

**Performance vs. Authenticity:
A Qualitative Study of a Muslim Primary School in Superdiverse London**

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Declaration

I, Thomas Evans, confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

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Abstract

This thesis is a qualitative study of a Muslim school and the community it serves in the London borough of “Queensbridge.” My research is predominantly based on semi-structured interviews with 36 participants including teachers, governors, administrative staff, parents, community members and former pupils of “Zamzam Primary School” (ZPS).

Participants celebrated Queensbridge for its superdiversity, which facilitated the practice of their faith as a religious minority, whilst critiquing the area for its poverty and crime. The two defining features of the Muslim school were seen to be an Islamic ethos and curriculum, although the latter differed very little from the British national curriculum. Many participants viewed ZPS as an innocence preserving bubble and suggested pupils would encounter challenges when entering the state system. Conversely, some informants asserted that popular culture infiltrated this “cocoon,” a set of circumstances compounded by Ofsted interventions that required the school to conform to a neoliberal ideology of education.

I also address participants’ motivations to become teachers and work in a Muslim school. The most commonly cited reasons were opportunities to observe, express and impart an Islamic identity and practices unimpeded. Negatives ranged from scant resources, institutional disorganisation, failed fellowship and superficial spirituality. Parents enrolled their children in ZPS to ground them in their religion whilst acquiring the necessary skills for career based success and social mobility. Former pupils of ZPS celebrated the intimate, communal and supportive space in which they studied.

This study seeks to provide an accurate and detailed image of a British Muslim community and its school. It also identifies and explores the tensions experienced by members of Zamzam Primary and the wider Queensbridge community regarding performance and authenticity in a faith school which aspired to implement Islamic ideals, whilst operating within a secular political system.

Impact Statement

In this qualitative study of a Muslim school in the superdiverse London borough of “Queensbridge” I have documented, all things considered, the “normality” or those normal aspects of “Zamzam Primary” by mainstream educational standards and cultural norms. I have captured in participant accounts the minutiae of the mundanity of school life in twenty-first century Britain ranging from the superdiversity and dense social networks of inner city London, the intrigue of office politics, the stresses of teaching, the aspirations of parents and the voracious consumption of pop culture amongst young people. I suspect much of this snapshot would be replicated amongst other schools, be they faith or secular, Muslim or otherwise, throughout the UK. This study thus adds to the body of knowledge concerning the education sector and teaching profession in modern Britain and can be used to inform best practice, from university courses to workforce training, especially in areas surrounding diversity and inclusion.

This organisational study informed by critical realism and ethnography also adds to existing work in those fields whilst casting illumination upon an area in which there is not a great wealth of qualitative research: life in British Muslim schools for parents, pupils and practitioners, foregrounding their voices. This ethnographically informed investigation depicts a slightly dysfunctional but essentially benign institution in possession of an ethos and curriculum intended to instil good character and conduct in pupils and facilitate employment prospects for them in a manner not too dissimilar from the average state school. This study thus provides an authentic and accurate representation of Muslim identities, ideologies and institutions, counter to the negative caricatures that proliferate, especially in mainstream media outlets be they web, print or screen. It would be hoped that this thesis could be drawn upon by researchers, especially outside of academia, to inform output, from policies to programming, that counter these narratives, ideas and imagery not just in Britain but in other Western nations with sizeable Muslim communities experiencing heightened scrutiny and discrimination in the post-9/11 climate.

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“Raising my head to the sky, B.I.G. I did it, multi before I die.”

Glossary

Abi: father.

Adab/Akhlaq: manners.

Ahl al-Hadith: a Muslim group that follows prophetic tradition closely.

Alhamdulillah: all praise to God.

Ajar: reward.

Asalaamu alaikum: (greeting) peace be upon you.

Asr: the mid-afternoon Muslim prayer.

Astagfirullah: God forgive me.

Ayah: literally, “sign” but used to describe verses in the Qur’an.

BME: Black and/or Minority Ethnic.

Dar-ul-Loom: Qur’an School.

Deen: religion (Islam).

Deobandi: a revivalist movement within Sunni Islam, especially the Hanfi school.

DfE: Department for Education.

Dua: supplication.

Dugsi: Qur’an school (Somali).

Duhr: the lunchtime Muslim prayer.

Eid Al Fitr: the festival marking the end of Ramadan.

Eid Al Adha: the festival marking the completion of Hajj.

Hadith: Prophetic tradition.

Hajj: the major Islamic pilgrimage to Mecca.

Halal: religiously permissible.

Hanbali: one of the four main Islamic schools of thought.

Hanafi: one of the four main Islamic schools of thought.

Haram: religiously impermissible.

Haya: modesty.

Imam: one who leads prayers in a mosque.

Iman: faith.

Inshallah: God willing.

Jahiliya: ignorance, used to describe a time before the observance of Islam.

Jamat: congregation.

Jummah: the congregational Friday lunchtime prayer.

LEA: Local Education Authority.

Madrassa: a school teaching Islam, the Qur'an and Arabic.

Maghrib: the early-evening Muslim prayer.

Maliki: one of the four main Islamic schools of thought.

Mashallah: as God has willed.

Masjid/Mosque: the Muslim place of worship.

Moalama: Qur'an school (Somali).

Murabbi: a cultivator, used to describe educators.

Niqab/Niqabi: the face veil; a woman who wears the face veil.

NQT: Newly Qualified Teacher.

Ofsted: the British school inspection body.

Qadr: Divine predestination.

QIC: Queensbridge Islamic Centre.

Qur'an: the Islamic holy book.

Ramadan: the Islamic holy month in which fasting is observed.

Sahaba: the companions of the Prophet Muhammad.

Salafi: a revisionist movement calling for the return to an original untainted Islam.

Salah/Salat: prayer.

Seerah: biography.

Sha'fi: one of the four main Islamic schools of thought.

Shia: the second largest branch of Islam.

Sufism: a mystical trend within Islam.

Sunni: the largest denomination of Islam globally constituting 87-90% of Muslims.

Sunnah: the sayings, actions and tacit approvals of the Prophet Muhammad.

TA: teaching assistant.

Umrah: the lesser Islamic pilgrimage.

Ustadh: teacher.

Wudu: ritual ablution performed as a precursor to the Muslim prayer.

ZPS: Zamzam Primary School.

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Introduction

This qualitative study focuses upon a Muslim school serving a British Muslim community in a South London borough referred to pseudonymously as Queensbridge (a practice I follow when discussing this and other neighbouring areas). My interest in the Queensbridge community stems from my interactions with its personalities and engagement with its institutions. I first encountered the Queensbridge community a decade ago as a musician living in a nearby area of South London. Following my own conversion to Islam in 2005, I frequently attended the Queensbridge mosque, drawing spiritual affirmation and inspiration via active participation in community life. Upon marrying in 2008, I moved away from Queensbridge and started a family, only to return to the community in 2010 as a teacher at Zamzam Primary - the school attached to Queensbridge Islamic Centre (QIC) - where I still work. My familiarity with the Queensbridge congregation and what might be called their culture is advantageous as a researcher in accessing gatekeepers and spaces. My physical and emotional distance as a now West London resident and part-time employee of Zamzam Primary School (ZPS) is also useful in maintaining some form of objectivity, or rather, “disciplined subjectivity” (Erickson, 1984: 59) – a discussion to be reprised later and accompanied by demographic details about the Queensbridge community and locality.

My doctoral research will not be the first time I have conducted an investigation amongst the Queensbridge community. Whilst studying for my Masters degree (2011-2013), I embarked upon a number of projects involving pupils, parents and practitioners involved with Zamzam Primary. These included a sociolinguistic themed investigation into the use of formal and informal English amongst Year 6 pupils; a comparison of the evolving gender roles, ideologies and practices of Somali and Spanish speaking Latino migrants in London and finally, an exploration of the relationship between mainstream, heritage and “liturgical literacies” (Rosowsky, 2008) amongst two cohorts of year 6 pupils, which expanded into my Masters’ dissertation (2013). This was originally the intended area of my doctoral investigation but through the literature review and discussion with supervisors, I concluded that my proposed study was overly ambitious and my research questions

evolved into something quite different: a qualitative study exploring the attitudes and experiences of parents, students and teachers regarding private faith-based education. Before discussing my research methods, methodology and existing literature surrounding these topics, a brief sketch of Queensbridge as a locality and its communities may be of benefit, as will a passing glance at some of the salient concepts in this study and its main questions.

Queensbridge is a municipal borough of London with one of its largest populations (VA [Queensbridge], 2015). Like many other boroughs in the capital, Queensbridge could be described as “superdiverse” (Vertovec, 2009b) and is one of the most ethnically diverse local authorities in England:

Two out of every five residents are from a black and minority ethnic background. The largest BME groups are Black African and Black Caribbean: Black ethnic groups are estimated to comprise 30% of the total population of Queensbridge. ([Queensbridge] JSNA, 2012)

More recent studies place these figures even higher with almost half of Queensbridge residents identifying as BME (VA [Queensbridge], 2015) and the borough counting one of the largest Caribbean populations in Britain (Quirke, Potter & Conway, 2009). Whilst the largest ethnic group in Queensbridge describes itself as White British, this number and the actual proportion of residents stating White British as their ethnicity have decreased since the 2001 census ([Queensbridge].Gov, 2011). Moreover, more than three quarters of Queensbridge’s school children hail from black and minority ethnic communities (VA [Queensbridge], 2015), a significantly higher figure than the proportion within the resident population and perhaps indicative of the future make-up of Queensbridge’s adult population ([Queensbridge] JSNA, 2012). Muslims currently comprise less than 10% of Queensbridge’s population (Local Stats, 2011). Using the Department for Communities and Local Government’s Indices of Deprivation, Queensbridge ranks amongst the 50 most deprived local authorities, situating it in the 20% most deprived areas in England (VA [Queensbridge], 2015). In addition, Queensbridge has the highest proportion of children, young people and older people in economic deprivation in England (DCLG, 2015). Furthermore, almost half of 19 year olds have no qualifications whilst almost 12% of the working-age population receive an out-of-

work benefit,. Queensbridge also has the one of the highest underage pregnancy rates of any London borough (NPI, 2016).

A focal point of Queensbridge's Muslim community - comprised of many cultural, national, ethnic and linguistic communities (Gilliat-Ray, 2010) - is its mosque. This red-bricked four-storey building overlooks a bustling high street and has functioned as a place of worship since the late 1990s – before that it was a nightclub. As the Queensbridge congregation has expanded on account of migration, marriage, birth and conversion,¹ the community's assets and aspirations have increased and diversified; consequently, the mosque complex has grown rapidly in size. The first building incorporated into the mosque's estate was a print shop purchased and transformed into a bookshop selling Islamic literature, clothing, DVDs and perfumes. Renovated recently, the ground floor of the former print shop turned book store now functions as a youth club and women's prayer area (secondary to the upper hall in the mosque itself) whilst a gymnasium and office operate upstairs. The second phase of expansion involved the purchase of a bookmakers two doors down, now Zamzam Primary School's nursery, which also doubles up as additional space for Friday congregational prayers. Finally, an Internet café (owned by a member of the mosque congregation) situated between the mosque and nursery was acquired to host the now relocated and much larger bookstore. In addition, a number of buildings on the main road adjacent were purchased by members of the Queensbridge community and turned into small business enterprises.

At Friday congregational prayers - attended by approximately two thousand worshippers (a figure provided by QIC management) - one may observe the superdiversity of a community comprised of people with Pakistani, Bengali, Nigerian, Sudanese, Afghan, Somali, Gambian, Sierra Leonean, Algerian and Moroccan heritage as well as converts of predominantly Black African or Caribbean ancestry but also White British backgrounds. The superdiverse (Vertovec, 2009b; Arnaut & Spotti, 2014 and Spoonely, 2014) character of the congregation is in part reflective of the inner city area of Queensbridge and transnational (Vertovec, 2009a

¹ Although no official literature exists on the number of Muslim converts in the Queensbridge community, the Imam Of Queensbridge Islamic Centre has publically stated in numerous sermons I have attended during my involvement with the institution that there were over 1000 converts in the mosque's first decade of existence.

and Blommaert, 2012) practices are evident in local shop fronts advertising remittance services and international phone cards; moreover, this diversity upon diversity is characteristic of London, a global city (Hannerz, 2001; Sassen, 2005 and Block, 2006) and neoliberal hub (Gill, 1995 and George, 1999).

This study focuses on one aspect of Queensbridge community life: education. Specifically, the ideologies, aspirations and approaches of British Muslim parents towards their children's academic lives and of those of the practitioners teaching them. My interest in this area was sparked by my own experiences of living in Queensbridge and subsequently working in the community faith school, Zamzam Primary. In conducting this research, I draw attention from the outset to my own partiality and how it might underpin and affect my investigation. As someone who was educated in the state sector and socialised into a secular, liberal 3-point worldview with its foregrounding of values such as i. care, ii. liberty and iii. fairness (see Haidt, 2012 as discussed in chapter 3), I am seeking to investigate, understand, question and potentially even challenge the nature of private faith schooling at ZPS. I will also be exploring the socially conservative nature of the Queensbridge community in which Zamzam Primary is located; the neoliberal framework the school operates in as well as any tensions between an authentic and performed Islam enacted at the study site. I discuss many of these points concerning partiality in greater detail in the third chapter addressing methodological considerations; presently, I provide information on Zamzam Primary School itself before turning to my research questions.

The Queensbridge community school, Zamzam Primary, was founded in 2005 with two classes comprised of children of two families.² It is now a single entry school with 82 male and female pupils enrolled in six classes (one of which was a combined year 5 and 6 class) including a reception year established in 2013 and a nursery catering to 24 pupils in 2014. No class contains more than 20 pupils, small numbers in comparison to the average key stage 1 class size of 27.4 (DfE, 2015) whilst the average London primary school has 399 students registered (Learning Plus UK, 2014). Like the Queensbridge congregation, the student body hails from "a range of

² A history narrated by to me by parent-governor Sami - one of the founding families.

diverse ethnic minority backgrounds” with a few “at an early stage of speaking English as an additional language” whilst “almost all speak more than one language” (Ofsted, 2013). At the time of the study, the school employed fifteen members of staff, four of whom four were qualified teachers (including the Head and myself), as well as providing volunteering opportunities for young people with aspirations to become educators, although these numbers would shift throughout the study, as will be seen.

The school itself is situated in converted commercial premises next to QIC and, as will emerge in participant accounts, has developed in a process of “institutional isomorphism” (Dacin, 1997: 47 in Breen, 2009: 1) over the years. For example, classrooms were extended, redecorated and equipped with whiteboard technology, Internet access established and an ICT lab installed, whilst Year 2 and 6 pupils have been entered for SATs exams since 2010. The school’s governing body, working in collaboration with the management committee of Queensbridge Islamic Centre (detailed below in figure 1), oversees the formulation of policies and procedures, the recruitment of teachers, the provision of support and training for staff, whilst holding leadership to account. As an independent school operating under the proprietorship of QIC, Zamzam Primary charges annual fees of £2800 per pupil (www.zamzamprimary.co.uk, 2016), substantially less than the national average for private schools of £15,500 per pupil (Chu, 2016). ZPS is also active in the wider Queensbridge community and invites members of local institutions such as the police, library, fire service, council, charities, schools and faith groups to run activities, assemblies and workshops for parents, staff and children. As a non-association independent school, Zamzam Primary is subject to the legal requirement for inspection at the direction of the DfE (Department for Education) (www.gov.uk, 2015). At the time of research (2015-16 academic year), Ofsted had most recently inspected the school in 2013 and granted it an adequate rating overall, the third time it had been assessed as such (Ofsted, 2013³). The table below provides a picture of the organisational structure of Zamzam Primary School:

³ I have not included the hyperlink to the report in the bibliography, as this would compromise Zamzam Primary School’s anonymity.

Figure 1: The Organisational Structure of Zamzam Primary School

Proprietors:	Queensbridge Islamic Centre (QIC)
Board of Governors:	Head of Governors, Deputy Head of Governors, Clerk, Finance Manager, governors, ZPS Head, Teacher Representative, Parent Representative.
Senior Leadership Team:	Head, Deputy Head and Nursery Manager.
Administrative Staff:	School Administrator, Canteen Manager and QIC Caretaker.
Teaching Staff:	Teachers, teaching assistants, PE teacher, nursery nurses and volunteers.
School Community:	Parent Teacher Association, parents and QIC congregation.

1.2 Research Questions

Having presented a brief portrait of Zamzam Primary and its surrounding locality, I now move to a summary of this project's key themes before addressing my research questions. My study is concerned with the attitudes, approaches and experiences of the Muslims of Queensbridge, and through them more broadly of British Muslims, in relation to private faith-based schooling. Whilst Muslims have been present in the UK since the nineteenth century, a British Islam is an emergent and evolving socio-political phenomenon (Baxter, 2006 and Suleiman, 2012). British Muslims are the largest religious minority in the UK with a majority tracing their ancestry back mainly to the Indian Subcontinent, although the community - or rather, communities - is heterogeneous in beliefs, cultures and practices (Vertovec, 2007b). A relatively recent survey exploring coexistence amongst different demographics of people found the British Muslim population to be young, growing and strongly invested in a British identity (Green, 2009). However, British Muslim communities are also beset by disadvantage in the realms of education, employment, health and housing, an outcome influenced by multiple variables besides religious affiliation. British Muslims are concentrated in urban centres: approximately one million live in

London. As a site of superdiversity, transnationalism and neoliberalism, London as a global city attracts migrants internationally on account of opportunity, innovation and excellence in industry, culture and finance. The capital's colonial and commonwealth connections coupled with "magnanimous multiculturalism"⁴ can be considered additional "pull" factors although post-Brexit this might well change. Twenty-first century London can be characterised as possessing diversity upon diversity that yields material benefits such as product development and enhanced productivity, albeit offset by issues of social cohesion and new racisms. Whilst "the myth of return" (Bolognani, 2007) and transnational political engagement may appeal to some migrant families, including those who are British Muslims, many transmit high aspirations and expectations to their children, especially in the field of education, which is seen as the route to social mobility in the host nation.

Berglund has described The Muslim School as an institution in which children are educated about Islam and into it (2014), just as The Christian School "enshrines belief" amongst its pupils (Peshkin, 1986). Whilst there are a number of Muslim schools in the UK, a consensus has yet to be reached amongst stakeholders concerning what the archetypal Islamic educational institution is and how to implement its objectives (Hussain, 2004 and Lawson, 2005). The existing situation is compounded further by Ofsted accountability resulting in the adoption and implementation of mainstream educational curriculums and practices in a process of institutional isomorphism (Breen, 2009). Such concepts are of relevance to my own investigation and prompt the following research questions: -

1. What are the perceptions of teachers, parents and past pupils regarding the role and purpose of a Muslim faith school in the London borough of Queensbridge?

- 1.1 What ideologies and discourses underpin Muslim faith schools?

- 1.2 What tensions, if any, exist between government education policy

⁴ For example, refer to Lindley & Van Hear on how Somali migrants feel they may express their cultural identity without impediment in the UK (2007) as opposed to other European nations like Denmark where families have reported that they experience pressure to assimilate and cannot live "the Somali way" (Fink-Nielsen et al 2004: 29).

and the conceptions of stakeholders in Muslim faith schools?

2. What are the motivations of key stakeholders – teachers, parents, past pupils – in relation to the role and purpose of a Muslim faith school in the London borough of Queensbridge?

2.1 Why do teachers choose to work in a Muslim school?

2.2 Why do parents choose to send their children to a Muslim faith school?

2.3 What are the views of past pupils who have studied in a Muslim faith school?

To answer these questions, I have conducted a qualitative study (in accordance with IOE ethical guidelines) that I now provide an outline of. Following this introduction, chapter two is a review of the literature, to provide a backdrop to my own research. I start by looking at the history of Muslims in Britain, before exploring concepts of relevance to my study such as neoliberalism, superdiversity, migrant aspirations and approaches to education in the West, as well as Muslim schools. The third chapter is a discussion of methods and methodology focusing on critical realism as a framework to house my qualitative research. I also address the interview techniques employed in data collection, transcription and analysis during both pilot study and main investigation and how these developed.

Chapter four addresses, in part, my first research question by providing a proper context to my study site. My participants, including parents and teachers, either live in or commute to Queensbridge and describe it as a superdiverse borough in a global city with an active Muslim community. Many informants perceived Queensbridge's diversity as a positive that facilitated the formation of a Muslim social network enabling the practice of one's religion unimpeded. Conversely, they also felt the area was afflicted with poverty, pollution and, in some areas, racism and violence. Chapter five is a detailed exploration of participants' conceptualisations of the Muslim School, pinpointing a religious ethos and curriculum as making such

institutions - and Zamzam Primary in particular - “Islamic.” Whilst the curriculum possessed spiritual and secular content that could be and at times was integrated it was mostly taught separately. Some informants suggested that historically, Zamzam Primary’s curriculum was entirely Islamicised and had been compelled by Ofsted in more recent times to adopt a more secular approach. A number of participants argued that there was considerable overlap between Muslim and state schools, especially in what was taught and how as well as exposure to and consumption of mainstream culture. Others felt the school was a “bubble” in which pupils were closeted and, as a consequence, were unaware and unprepared for external life.

Chapter six explores the call to teaching amongst male and female participants alongside their positive and negative experiences of working in Zamzam Primary. Awakening religiosity, altruism, a love of children and a pragmatic professionalism in which teaching as a means to remuneration, were given as reasons for becoming educators. In addition, the freedom to enjoy and observe religious language, dress and ritual were specific drivers to work in a Muslim school. Conversely, limited resources, inadequate facilities, disorganised management and an insufficient support network for staff were seen to impact deleteriously upon teaching and learning. Participants also highlight the disconnect between the ideal Muslim school and the reality of ZPS, replete with what I describe as a failed fellowship and superficial spirituality.

Chapter seven is a discussion of parents’ motivations for sending their children to Zamzam Primary as well as a recounting pupils’ experiences of life in the school. Parents perceived ZPS as an authentically Islamic environment in which pupils could study their religion and practise its rituals alongside learning practical worldly knowledge that would facilitate social mobility. Others mentioned their own negative experiences of attending state schools and an ideological critique of the mainstream sector as a reason for their engagement with Islamic education. Some parental criticisms of ZPS overlapped with the concerns of staff regarding inadequate facilities and resources. Nevertheless, the school environment was described as warm, welcoming and inclusive; an ethnically diverse but exclusively Muslim safe space in which children could learn Islamic manners and morals whilst enjoying attentive and compassionate teaching in small classes.

I summarise my research in chapter eight, where I examine the tensions experienced by members of Zamzam Primary and the wider Queensbridge community regarding performance and authenticity in a Muslim school operating within a secular western system. I also evaluate the study's merits as well as areas for improvement before making a number of conclusions and future recommendations.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

In this chapter, I review existing literature concerning major themes and concepts connected to my study. I begin by exploring the history of Muslims in Britain to provide a backdrop to my research. I then examine the notion of London as a global city and neoliberal hub, to situate my investigation geographically as well as providing an economic and political context to my research. I also explore the concept of superdiversity and how it can relate to my participants' own lives before dissecting migrant attitudes towards education, especially those of Chinese communities who share outlooks on education and employment similar to those of my British Muslim participants. Lastly, I look at Muslim schools in Britain as a precursor to my study proper.

2.1 Muslims in Britain

“British Islam,” as a social and political concept enacted publicly (Baxter, 2006), is emergent and evolving (Suleiman, 2012) with accompanying evidence of increasing public interest in Muslims and Islam (Hargreaves, 2014). The physical presence of Muslims in Britain, however, can be dated back as far as the 1700s (Visram, 1986; Matar, 1998 and Ansari, 2004 in Panjwani, 2009). The first Muslim migrants to the UK were Yemeni seamen and traders who settled in British ports (Matar, 1998 in Abbas, 2007 and Suleiman, 2009) such as Cardiff, Liverpool and London (Siddiqi, 1995 and Ansari, 2002), or were arrivals from the Indian subcontinent coming to study or engage in commerce (Matar, 1998 in Abbas, 2007). Nevertheless, it was not until midway through the twentieth century that the British Muslim presence became sizeable, numbering approximately five thousand people, as documented in the 1951 census (Baxter, 2006).⁵ Immigration increased following the close of the Second World War with an influx of Pakistanis, Bangladeshis and Indians to meet the labour demands in industrial cities in the South-East, Midlands and the North (Parker-Jenkins, 1995; Gilliat-Ray, 1998; Khan, 2000; Baxter, 2006; Abbas, 2007 and Sahin, 2013). Migration accelerated further in 1961 when news of the impending 1962 Commonwealth Immigrants Act - which curtailed automatic entry into the UK for Commonwealth citizens - became widespread (Siddiqi, 1995 and Ansari, 2002).

⁵ The census question concerning religious affiliation was not added until 2001, so how these numbers were calculated is uncertain, perhaps by examining name and country of birth.

Consequently, men who travelled to the UK seeking employment became bridgeheads for chain migration flows as their families trickled in to join them (Baxter, 2006). In the 1970s, Arab communities arrived in London and since the end of that decade a steady flow of Muslim political dissidents and economic migrants have entered the UK, settling successfully. Despite a tapering off due to additional legislation, immigration continued during the 1980s and 1990s because of the further reuniting of families and the arrival of asylum seekers (Ansari, 2002).

The end of the twentieth century saw an influx of Eastern European, African and Middle Eastern Muslim refugees to Britain from countries including Nigeria, Somalia, Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq, Bosnia, Turkey and Albania (Sahin, 2013). Despite perceptions of religious homogeneity in some quarters (Suleiman, 2012), Muslims in the UK are comprised of ethnically distinct “communities within communities” (Suleiman, 2009: 9) following a variety of Islamic traditions (Ansari, 2002 and Vertovec, 2007b). Sunni Muslims predominate and, within them, four main traditions: the devotionalist Barelwi Sufis; scripturally orientated Deobandis; the Islamist Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) inspired institutions and the Ahl al-Hadith (followers of prophetic traditions) (Hamid, 2016: 5). In addition, organisations representing minority communities such as Shi’a of the Ithna Ashari and Ismaili traditions are present as well as groups such as the Ahmadis and Nation of Islam, who consider themselves Muslim but are generally viewed as being outside the fold of orthodox Islam by many Muslim communities (Ansari, 2002). Moreover, increasing numbers of British Muslims are aligning themselves with the Salafi movement (Devine, 2014; The Week, 2015 and Inge, 2016) that has some overlap in core beliefs and methodology with the Ahl al-Hadith. British Muslims are concentrated in urban areas such as London, the West Midlands, West Yorkshire, South Lancashire and Central Clydeside (Parker-Jenkins, 1995 and Coles, 2008). London’s Muslim population is probably the most heterogeneous in the world outside of Mecca (Vertovec, 2007b) with a Maliki Tunisian woman “more likely to meet a Hanafi Pakistani woman in Britain than in her own country” (Panjwani, 2009: 116). 2.8 million Muslims were registered as living in the UK in the 2011 census (Sahin, 2013), earlier studies citing approximately half (Anwar, 2008) to 70% (Coles, 2008) as being British born with more than 60% residing in the Southeast of the country, predominantly in Greater London (Ansari, 2002). Two-thirds to 80% of British

Muslims are of South Asian heritage (Hussain, 2004; see also: Coles, 2008) with half claiming Pakistani ancestry (Barnes, 2006; Peach, 2006 and Abbas, 2007). Muslims are the largest religious minority in the UK at 4.8% (Suleiman, 2009; BBC News, 2012 and Sedghi, 2014) followed by Hindus (1.5%), Sikhs (0.8%) and Jews (0.5%) (BBC News, 2012). The British Muslim population is young (Eade & Garbin, 2006; Peach, 2006; Coles, 2008; Anwar, 2008; Sedghi, 2014 and Reynolds & Birdwell, 2015) with 48% (Sedghi, 2013) to half under the age of 25 (Lawson, 2005 and Barnes, 2006) and around a third under the age of 15 (Kirkup, 2015). Although birth rates are declining slightly, British Muslims still tend to have more children than the population as a whole (Ansari, 2002).

British Muslim communities are predominantly concentrated in deprived areas (Peach, 2006), for example, Kirkup reports how the “10 per cent of council wards that count as the most deprived parts of the country are now home to 1.2 million Muslims, around 46 per cent of the total” (2015). Consequently, many British Muslims have not benefited from the levels of social mobility enjoyed by other migrant groups, perhaps because of inherent class issues. British Muslims experience disadvantage in multiple realms including education (Eade & Garbin, 2006; Anwar, 2008; Coles, 2008; Afroze Kabir, 2010, Strand et al, 2010; Suleiman, 2012 and Kirkup, 2015) with general academic attainment low thus limiting further education and employment opportunities (Hewer, 2001 and Reynolds & Birdwell, 2015). Kirkup notes that 26% of British Muslims have no qualifications at all compared to 23% of the overall UK population (2015). Similarly, British Muslims are “under represented in top professions” (Reynolds & Birdwell, 2015) and are also more likely to suffer from unemployment or work in lower income/semi-skilled/unskilled occupations (Lawson, 2005; Modood, 2005; Coles, 2008 and Suleiman, 2012). For example, Kirkup remarks, “Around 20 per cent of the UK workforce does lower managerial, administrative and professional jobs, the first rung on the middle-class ladder. For Muslims, the figure is just 10 per cent” (2015). Moreover, higher levels of economic inactivity and inequality exist amongst Muslim women than other sectors of society (Peach, 2006; Coles, 2008; Hussain, 2008, Afroze Kabir, 2010 and The Economist, 2012 & 2015). Kirkup also juxtaposes the figure of 21.3% of British Muslims who have never worked against the 4.3% of the UK population as a whole (2015). Unsurprisingly, high numbers of British Muslims live in poor quality

housing, enduring overcrowding (Eade & Garbin, 2006; Anwar, 2008 and Afrose Kabir, 2010). For example, approximately 50% of British Pakistanis dwell in cheap terracing, whilst one third (The Economist, 2015) to 40% of Bangladeshis live in council accommodation (Hussain, 2008) plus three quarters of children from those two groups live in households below the poverty line (Coles, 2008). To compound matters further, British Muslims endure more health problems (Afrose Kabir, 2010 and Kirkup, 2015), are more likely to be victims of racially motivated crime (Coles, 2008) and have a disproportionately high presence in the prison population (Ibid). In 2000, 7% of prison inmates were Muslims (Lawson, 2005) in comparison to a figure of 3.07% of the national population as a whole; by the time of the 2011 census that figure had increased to 14% (Morris, 2014), in comparison to Muslims accounting for only 4.8% of the overall population (Sedghi, 2014).⁶

Whilst statistics of this nature provide a fleeting snapshot of Muslims in Britain making for disconcerting reading, they might be partially explained by issues surrounding class and migration not just race and religion. Nevertheless, there are still points of optimism: polls have depicted British Muslims as “model citizens” (Coles, 2008) who identify strongly with the UK (Green, 2009 and Suleiman, 2012), have faith in the police force (Green, 2009 and Hargreaves, 2014), are tolerant of other religions (Green, 2009) and are especially charitable (Huffington Post, 2013). Furthermore, British Muslims have made great contributions to public services - especially the NHS, where they are over-represented amongst health professionals - and can now count fifteen MPs, 8 of whom are women (Muslim News, 2017) and more than two hundred councilors amongst their ranks (Suleiman, 2009). In addition, British Muslims – like many minority and migrant groups (as will become evident in chapter 2.5), are especially committed to education with some notable successes⁷ in spite of challenging circumstances. In the coming chapters I explore the relevance of the above figures and themes to my own study.

⁶ According to the 2001 Census, 73.65% of Muslims in the UK were Asian whilst only 6.88% were black. By comparison, the percentage of male Muslims in prison who were black in 2000 numbered approximately 33% whilst 40% were Asian (Beckford, 2005 and Spalek & El-Hassan, 2007) and 12% white, presumably converts (Beckford, 2005). This could suggest that high rates of conversion to Islam exist especially amongst Black British men – perhaps, in part, out of expediency - and that Black Muslims experience more social and economic deprivation (Spalek & El-Hassan, 2007).

⁷ One voluntary-aided Muslim school was amongst the 100 highest achieving schools in England and Wales; see: Suleiman, 2012.

2.2 London: Neoliberal “Non-Place,” Global City

Having sketched a portrait of Muslims in Britain accompanied by a historical, geographical and socio-economic backdrop, this study will specifically explore the experiences of British Muslim families and educators engaging in private Islamic education in London. As a corollary, I now explore the concept of the capital as a global city and neoliberal “non-place” (on account of its decentered apparatus of control, coupled with networks that span boundaries of nation-states) and how this hegemonic political and ideological form of capitalist globalisation affects and influences daily interactions and experiences – including those of my participants in the context of their involvement with private faith-based education. Whilst global cities may operate under aliases such as “world cities”, “supervilles” or “informational cities” (Sassen, 2005), it is the common thread of neoliberalism that ties them together (Taylor et al, 2002). Neoliberalism is “the belief that open, competitive, and unregulated markets, liberated from all forms of state interference, represent the optimal mechanism for economic development” (Brenner & Theodore, 2002: 350). As an ideology, neoliberalism has been perceived as both distinct and as a revival of the classic liberalism espoused by John Locke and Adam Smith and its more modern representatives such as Friedrich von Hayek who notes:

Liberalism is opposed, however, to supplanting competition by inferior methods of guiding economic activity. And it regards competition as superior not only because in most circumstances it is the most efficient method known but also because it is the only method which does not require the coercive or arbitrary intervention of authority. It dispenses with the need for ‘conscious social control’ and gives individuals a chance to decide whether the prospects of a particular occupation are sufficient to compensate for the disadvantages connected with it.

(Hayek, 2005: 45-46)

Whilst neoliberalism can be an evasive concept to define, one can understand it as a “loose set of ideas regarding how the relationship between the state and its external environment ought to be organised and not a complete political philosophy or ideology” (Thorsen, 2009: 16). On a practical level, neoliberalism can thus be said to entail: -

1. The deregulation of state control over major industries (George, 1999; Jessop, 2002; Brenner & Theodore, 2005; Harvey, 2007 and Peck, Theodore & Brenner, 2009).

2. Increased regulation of organised labour and trade unions (George, 1999; Brenner & Theodore, 2005 and Harvey, 2007).
3. The reduction of corporate taxes and increased consumer “choice” (George, 1999; Jessop, 2002 and Brenner & Theodore, 2005).
4. The shrinking and or privatisation of public sectors, services and assets and introduction of “user fees” (George, 1999; Giroux, 2002; Jessop, 2002; Routledge, 2003; Brenner & Theodore, 2005; Brown, 2006, Harvey, 2007 and Luban, 2015).
5. The dismantling of welfare programmes (George, 1999; Giroux, 2002; Jessop, 2002; Brown, 2006 and Harvey, 2007) and a de facto criminalisation of the urban poor (George, 1999; Brenner & Theodore, 2005 and Brown, 2006).
6. The elimination of trade barriers thus enhancing international capital mobility – free inward and outward flows (Gill, 1995; Jessop, 2002; Yeates, 2002; Routledge, 2003; Brenner & Theodore, 2005; Olssen & Peters, 2005; Brown, 2006 and Harvey, 2007) essentially from poor to rich nations (George, 1999).
7. The intensity of interlocality competition (George, 1999 and Peck, Theodore & Brenner, 2009) including the “imposition of decontextualized ‘best practice’ models upon local policy environments” (Brenner & Theodore, 2002: 372) that contributes to uneven spatial development (Brenner, 2004).

Neoliberalism as an expansive economic and political strategy was “rolled-out” (Routledge, 2003) in Britain, Chile, New Zealand, Sweden, South Africa and the United States from the late 1970s and 1980s onwards (George, 1999; Jessop, 2002; Peck, 2004, Harvey, 2007 and Peck, Theodore & Brenner, 2009). It is now the hegemonic political and ideological form of capitalist globalisation (George, 1999; McChesney, 1999 in Giroux, 2002; Yeates, 2002; Peck, 2004; Brenner & Theodore,

2005; Olssen & Peters, 2005; Harvey, 2007 and Ong, 2007), although it is “neither monolithic nor omnipresent, taking hybrid or composite forms around the world” (Routledge, 2003: 334). At an economic level, neoliberalism is connected to, but not synonymous with, globalisation because of its ideological congruency with and practical investment in free trade (Gill, 1995 and Olssen & Peters, 2005). Globalisation, however, is a much broader process of restructuring state and civil society, political economy and culture (Gill, 1995). It has occurred, in part, as an extension of capitalism and because of migration, displacement, population growth, technological and scientific developments resulting in space-time compression (Gill, 1995 and Olssen & Peters, 2005). Globalisation’s multidimensional character does not lend itself to overly simple explanations nor has consensus been reached concerning its meaning (Yeates, 2002). Nevertheless, the concept can be said to reify “a global economic system dominated by large institutional investors and transnational firms who control the bulk of the world’s productive assets and are the principle influences in world trade and financial markets” (Gill, 1995: 405). The neoliberal view of globalisation suggests that the privatisation and transnationalism of capital is inevitable and advantageous, for example, in the association of free competition and free exchange with economic efficiency, welfare, democracy and social progress (Gill, 1995).

For critics of neoliberalism, its deleterious effects have been experienced at a micro and macro level worldwide: from the dismantling of “welfare states and privatisation of public services in the North,” to the wrecking of “efforts of democratic sovereignty in the South” and the intensification of “income disparities everywhere” (Brown, 2006: 693). Enacted globally, neoliberalism is a “decentred, deterritorializing apparatus of imperial control” (Hardt & Negri, 2000: xii in Routledge, 2007: 334) characterised by “an absence of boundaries” with “no place of power – constituted by networks it is both everywhere and nowhere, a non-place” (Routledge, 2007: 334). Nevertheless, “geopolitical and geo-economic power does get territorialized in certain places,” (ibid) thus, the global city becomes prime estate for the enactment of neoliberal orientations alongside, as one might expect, processes of globalisation.

Cohen and Friedmann & Wolff conceived the world city hypothesis in the early

1980s (Brenner, 1998) with notable contributions from Hannerz (1996) and Sassen (2001a, 2001b and 2005; see also: Smith, 1998 and Block, 2006). Brenner notes “the global/world city theory has been consolidated as a major framework for critical research on contemporary cities and more generally on the changing spatial organisation of the world economy” (1998: 2). Consolidating this theme of space and place, Sassen posits that global cities and their networks are embedded in particular and strategic locations, yet are trans-territorial because connecting sites are not geographically close but intensely connected to each other (2005). Accordingly, global cities are zones where myriad globalisation processes assume concrete localised forms (Ibid). Block expands further, outlining the criteria required for admission to this urban premier league. Global cities are: -

1. Essential command centres in the world economy.
2. Locations of high-powered service industries and centres of international finance.
3. Sites of development and innovation in the service industries and international finance.
4. Markets for these developments and innovations in the service industries and international finance.
5. Sites of culture industries and innovations in these industries.
6. Sites of multiple and massive migrations of people from all around the world.
7. Diverse in every sense of the word – ethnically, racially, religiously, culinary and culturally.

(Block, 2006)

Global cities include Los Angeles, Detroit, Houston, Miami, Toronto, Tokyo, Frankfurt, Amsterdam, Zurich, Hong Kong, Singapore, Mexico City and Sao Paulo (Brenner, 1998); the “holy trinity,” however, are London, New York and Paris (Friedmann, 1993 in Smith & Timberlake, 1995; Hannerz, 1996; Taylor et al, 2002; Lipman, 2003; McCann, 2004; Mainwaring, Anderson & Chang, 2005; McDowell et al, 2005; Block, 2006 and Lupton & Sullivan, 2007). Whilst illuminating, the above list exemplifies a dual critique of global city theory: existing literature is extensive but dependent on a globalist edifice whose foundations are erected upon major western cities (Dicken et al, 2001); furthermore, it is neglectful of emergent global cities such as Shanghai (Wei & Leung, 2005). Other issues addressed by scholars in the global city concept are: -

1. Questions of power and inequality; managing, financing and servicing a global economy.
2. The growing inequalities between highly provisioned and profoundly

disadvantaged sectors and spaces of the city.

3. A networked economy (finance and specialised services, multimedia sectors, telecommunications).

4. The growing intensity of transactions in other domains - political, cultural, social and even criminal.

(Sassen, 2005)

Sassen reflects upon the duality of the global city in producing a new geography of centrality and marginality. Other scholars such as Hannerz (1996), Lipman (2003), McCann (2004), McDowell (2005) and Sofer (2007) have also explored the underbelly of these “alphavilles” (Mainwaring, Anderson & Chang, 2005): for example, intense urbanisation accompanied by class polarisation and inequities experienced disproportionately by women, immigrants and ethnic minorities (Gill, 1995 and Sassen, 2001b).

This study will explore the socio economic realities experienced by British Muslims, many of whom hail from migrant and/or minority ethnic backgrounds, in the superdiverse global city of London. I examine the attempts of British Muslim educational professionals to negotiate the “performativity culture” (Grace & O’Donoghue, 2004: iv) born of neoliberalism in a school setting and the tensions that ensue. I also examine the outlook and experiences of a superdiverse group of British Muslim parents seeking social mobility by investing in private faith-based education. I now explore the concept of superdiversity itself in greater detail.

2.3 Superdiversity

London, as a global city par excellence (Gordon, 2003; Fullick, 2007 and Findlay et al, 2008) and epicentre of neoliberalism can also lay claim to being a site of superdiversity. Such “hyperdiversity” or “deep diversity” (Spoonley, 2014) is one facet of “Late Modernity,” an era of hybridised, fragmented and polymorph identities, (Blommaert and Varis, 2011). Londoners hail from or possess ancestral ties to 179 countries and speak anywhere between 300 (Vertovec, 2006) to 360 languages (Baker & Eversley, 2000 in Lupton & Sullivan, 2007). Furthermore, of approximately 7 million Londoners at the turn of the Millennium, 2 million were born outside the UK or Republic of Ireland (GLA, 2005 in Lupton & Sullivan, 2007). In 2001, 40% of London’s population (and 50% of inner London) belonged to an ethnic group (Lupton & Sullivan, 2007) other than white British; by 2011, the

population had grown to 8.4 million and this ratio had reversed so that those classifying themselves as White British were a minority at 45% (Evening Standard, 2012). Nearly three quarters of England's total Black African population reside in London, as do 6 out of 10 black Caribbeans, half of the country's Bangladeshi population, a quarter of Indians, a third of white Irish, dual heritage and Chinese populations and a fifth of Pakistanis (McKenley, 2007).

Having examined London's superdiversity numerically, I explore it conceptually. Superdiversity can be said to encompass: -

1. Multi-ethnic areas of interaction.
2. Hyper-segregation or the simultaneous impact of multiple dimensions of ethnic residential concentration.
3. Multi-layered experiences of minority groups within unequal power structures and social locations.
4. Pluralism and its prevailing notions that take into account differential rights and modes of incorporation among ethnic groups.

(Vertovec, 2009b)

Arnaut and Spotti, meanwhile, employ a metaphor of "simultaneity" to underpin superdiversity: -

1. Multiple embeddedness i.e. migrants form networks of social relations traversing multiple social fields.
2. Intersectionality or "the complex, irreducible, varied and variable effects which ensue when multiple axis of differentiation - economic, political, cultural, psychic, subjective and experiential - intersect in historically specific contexts" (Brah & Phoenix, 2004: 76).
3. Scalarity i.e. horizontal links (threads) and vertical moves (jumps) of interaction events and meaning-making processes that unfold over time and across contexts.

(Arnaut and Spotti, 2014)

Without reducing diversity to binaries, banalities or bullet-points, I now seek to discuss the implications and outcomes of its superlative incarnation. Traditionally, diversity (in a British setting) was associated with relatively discrete if not homogenous ethnic communities of post-colonial economic migrants and their families (Phillmore, 2011), namely African-Caribbeans and South Asians (Cantle, 2008; Vertovec, 2009b and Wessendorf, 2014). However, in recent years, the EU and UK especially have experienced a transformative "diversification of diversity" (Vertovec, 2007a and Sepulveda, Syrett & Lyon, 2011) or "population churn" (Mayo

et al, 2009). High economic performance, the demands for migrant workers, a rise in asylum seekers and EU accession have all lead to an increase in the number and nature of migrants travelling to the UK. Accordingly, one can no longer discuss diversity solely in relation to ethnicity; one must also consider issues surrounding immigration status (Vertovec, 2007b), associated rights and entitlements, divergent labour market experiences, gender and age profiles and patterns of spatial distribution, to name but a few (Vertovec, 2007a and Sepulveda, Syrett & Lyon, 2011). Vertovec notes:

Simple-ethnicity focussed approaches to understanding and engaging various minority “communities” in Britain, as taken in many conventional models and policies within conventional multiculturalism, is inadequate and often inappropriate for dealing with individual migrants or understanding their dynamics of inclusion or exclusion.

(Vertovec, 2010: 80)

With this “diversification of appearances of what used to be seen as one single community”, it thus becomes more useful to “describe actual practices rather than the social formations that are supposed to perform them” (Blommaert, 2015: 6). One example could be superdiversity’s capacity to translate into material benefits and enhanced productivity in areas with large immigrant populations. This “diversity dividend” can create a fertile environment for the cultivation of ideas that augment artistry, experimentation and imagination as well as - with accompanying investments and increased local demand - innovations in product and process development (Spoonely, 2014). Besides matters pecuniary, superdiversity may also reflect and contribute to emergent global links plus a local meets international cosmopolitanism and creolisation incorporating multiple cultural competencies (Vertovec, 2006). In the top tier of global cities like London, New York and Paris, superdiversity translates into more food, more entertainment, more religions, cultural ways and artifacts from around the world than one would encounter in Britain, the USA or France (Block, 2006). These capitals cease being national cities and become cities of the world (Hannerz, 1996), London being “an outpost for every community and nation” (Tarlo, 2007: 135). One might provide a tangible example of superdiversity with Blommaert’s inner-city neighbourhood of Oud-Berchem in Antwerp, Belgium: “in order to go to the Belgian hairdresser, one has to pass a Turkish supermarket, a Belgian hardware store, a Turkish and Bulgarian café, a

Turkish kebab shop, a Moroccan butcher and a Gujarati grocery” (2014b: 1). The superdiverse nature of the area has contributed to a virtual urban Venn diagram of overlapping infrastructures, institutions and interactions; diversity upon diversity, diversity within diversity.

Conversely, superdiversity may also confront and challenge ideas and applications of communal civic culture and citizenship, raising concerns about social cohesion and ethnic (Cantle, 2008) or religious segregation (Rodriguez-Garcia, 2010). In addition, anxieties about the increasingly diverse nature of labour markets and communities have been associated with discrimination and divisive politics surrounding race and immigration (Spoonley, 2014) and engagement with government (Mayo et al, 2009). New patterns of inequality and injustice may also arise. This can be resentment and “emergent racism” of resident British citizens towards newcomers such as Eastern Europeans, Roma, Somalis, Kosovans and “bogus” asylum seekers, of long-standing ethnic minorities against immigrants⁸ and amongst newcomers themselves directed towards British ethnic minorities (Vertovec, 2006). Finally, concerns surround the concept of superdiversity itself, firstly, whether it is an ontological or historical claim, Siebers noting:

Is reality after all superdiverse, independently of time and place? Or, alternatively, is superdiversity something that marks specific historical configurations due to specific political, social, economic and cultural factors that render these configurations superdiverse, different from other configurations in time and place?
(Siebers, 2014: 3)

A second issue is superdiversity’s preoccupation with “presentism” (Pavlenko, 2014) a point also raised in discussions surrounding transnationalism. Baudinette, for example, points out that scholars have actually been researching superdiversity in Australia for the past two decades and that the concept is not as novel as may be thought (2013). Another area of critique is superdiversity’s Western-centric fixation with the localities that immigrants “come to,” less so where they come from (Pavlenko, 2014); plus where “they” come from is often assumed to be homogenous, bucolic and rural (Vertovec, 2009b). In spite of such criticisms, the concept of superdiversity can be seen as remarkable for its seemingly unremarkable nature to

⁸ See: Creese & Blackledge, 2010 on “freshies,” plus Shah, 2008 and Warikoo, 2011 on racism directed towards Somalis by other minority ethnic groups.

many inhabitants of global cities; a “cornershop cosmopolitanism” (Wessendorf, 2010) typified by a “lived everyday multiculturalism” and “conviviality” (Wessendorf, 2014: 9) – as seen in the Oud-Berchem neighbourhood of Blommaert (2014a). In this study, I employ the concept of superdiversity to understand, interpret and explain the lives of my participants involved in faith-based education whilst living in a global city like London. Having provided a socio-political backdrop to my research I now review literature pertaining more closely to my participants and their attitudes and approaches to education.

2.4 Migrant Educational Aspirations and Approaches

Large sections of British Muslims, like many numerous minority ethnic groups in Western settings, exhibit high educational aspirations for their children as noted by Kao & Tienda (1995); Tomlinson (1997); Cheng & Starks (2002); Conner et al (2004); Taylor & Krahn (2005); Strand (2007); Gutman & Akerman (2008); Strand et al (2010); Chua (2011); Caruana, Coposescu and Scaglione, (2013) and Chua & Rubenfeld (2014). Amongst these communities education is seen “as a means of social and occupational mobility” (Gutman & Akerman 2008: 7) with the case of Chinese migrant families providing a practical exemplar for this investigation. Specific examples may be found of parents within Chinese migrant communities - and beyond - who conceive of education not just as a route to social mobility (Chen 2007) but as the route to social mobility (Louie, 2001). Chinese parents may assess their own performance as mothers and fathers in relation to their children’s academic attainment and, for those hailing from less affluent backgrounds, are determined their children will enjoy a superior education to their own (Francis & Archer, 2005b). Chinese parents often value education less for its intrinsic worth but for its institutions and accreditation as a form of human capital that then accrues economic capital (Francis and Archer, 2005b and Chen, 2007) and social capital (Li, 2001). It might be timely to mention Bourdieu’s concept of capital, initially partitioned into three forms. These are:

Economic capital, which is immediately and directly convertible into money and may be institutionalized in the form of property rights; as cultural capital, which is convertible, in certain conditions, into economic capital and may be institutionalized in the form of educational qualifications; and as social capital, made up of social obligations (“connections”), which is convertible, in certain conditions, into economic capital and may be institutionalized in the form of a title of nobility.

Later on in this study I explore the concept of spiritual capital, an adaptation and extension to Bourdieu's initial concept and of particular relevance to this study of a faith community and its religious institutions. Returning to Confucian tradition, the primary driver for educational and vocational success is less inspiration than industry (Li, 2006 and Fung & Chen 2012). Of relevance to this are two US-based studies, which examined specific manifestations of a Chinese parenting style and its positive contribution to children's education accomplishments. Chen and Uttal (1988) compared the attitudes of Anglo-American and Chinese parents to school success: White American parents took their child's satisfaction with school life into account, assessing their experiences holistically, whereas Chinese parents did not. Chinese parents, however, spent more time supporting their children with homework and exhibited higher expectations of academic performance than US-born parents. They also placed strong emphasis on the role of teachers whilst European American parents believed they themselves were more important.

Similarly, in a study exploring "Middle Class Chinese Immigrant Parents Perspectives on Literacy Learning, Homework, and School-Home Communication" (2006), Li echoed much of Chen and Uttal's findings. Chinese parents were more likely than Anglo-Americans to engage children in literacy activities every day and to provide structured and formal education experiences for children after school and at weekends. They placed greater value on education than White American parents, were willing to invest more and intervene directly (for example, through tutoring; see also: Louie, 2001) to remedy perceived shortcomings of school. To summarise, in comparison to European American parents, Chinese parents tended to:

Monitor their children more closely, moralise more often, emphasise greater sense of family obligation, value grades more than general cognitive achievement, evaluate more realistically a child's academic and personality characteristics, be less satisfied with a child's accomplishments, and believe more in effort and less in innate ability as a factor in school success.

(Hidalgo, Siu & Epstein, 2004: 640 in Li, 2006: 30)

It appears that this educational philosophy is often transmitted to children: Chinese mothers and fathers inculcate children with a belief system focused on internal goals (Chen & Uttal, 1988), a sense of filial piety (Francis and Archer), maintaining "face"

(Francis & Archer, 2005b) and even guilt because of parental sacrifices (Kao, 2004; Francis & Archer, 2005b and Chua & Rubenfeld, 2014). Accordingly, Chinese pupils may internalise and implement self-control and effort, defer pleasure (Francis & Archer, 2005b) and are driven by competitiveness and a “Triadic Motor” (Modood, 2004) shared with parents, family and community to ensure the achievement of academic goals thus facilitating social mobility and offsetting collective disappointment.

In conducting a study investigating the attitudes and approaches of British Muslim migrant parents and pupils towards education, the experiences of Chinese communities in Western settings provide a valuable frame of reference and an opportunity to draw comparisons with my own participants. This is especially the case with Somali families (constituting a large proportion of the Zamzam Primary school community) who also respect education and possess high ambitions for their children (Khan & Jones, 2003; Harris, 2004; Cousins, 2005; O’Brien, 2006; Demie, Lewis & Mclean, 2007 & 2008; Mahdi, 2009; CWDC, 2009; Rees, 2009; Omar, 2009 & 2010; Strand et al, 2010 and Chouhan, Speeden & Qazi, 2011), as will become evident in this study.

2.5 Muslim Schools with Islamic Aspirations

Having explored the concepts of neoliberalism, superdiversity and migrant experiences of education in the Western nations, I now look more specifically at the attitudes and approaches of British Muslims to the school system. There are an estimated 500,000 Muslim children of school age in the UK (Suleiman 2012 and Bagley & Al-Refai, 2014) with Kirkup calculating that these pupils constitute 8.1% of the national school population (2015). It has been noted elsewhere that 99% of Muslim children attend state schools leaving 1% enrolled in (overwhelmingly) private Muslim schools (Parker-Jenkins, 2011 and Bagley & Al-Refai, 2014) or perhaps home educated, an increasingly popular trend and not just in religiously conservative Muslim communities (Lawson, 2005 and Jeffreys, 2015). Before examining the nature of Muslim schools in more detail, a distinction needs to be made here between the Muslim school and the madrassa - also known as a “Dar-ul - Loom.” The former admits students on a full-time basis with secular and religious subjects studied; the latter usually only teaches Qur’an, Hadith, Seerah and Arabic

and is usually attended after-school and/or on weekends. The majority of British Muslim children will have attended a madrassa regularly at some point in their lives while only a few are enrolled in Muslim schools (Coles, 2008 and Suleiman, 2012). Returning to Muslim schools themselves, the first were established in Britain during the 1980s (Nielsen, 1994 in Hussain, 2004) rising to 25 by the mid-90s (Parker-Jenkins, 1995) and 60 at the turn of the millennium, two of which enjoyed state funding (Driessen & Valkenberg, 2000); by 2014, there were 156 (AMS, 2014 and Kirkup, 2015). Variation in figures during the interim time period may be attributable to operational flux: Muslim schools have been known to open and close frequently due to financial insecurity, as observed by Parker-Jenkins in 1995 and again in 2011; evidently, instability endures (see also: Hewer, 2001). There are currently 18 state-funded Muslim schools in the UK educating approximately 7,000 pupils alongside 4,609 Church of England, 1,985 Roman Catholic, 48 Jewish, 8 Sikh, 4 Hindu, 2 Greek Orthodox and 1 Seventh Day Adventist schools catering to approximately 1.8 million pupils (Long & Bolton, 2015).

With an increase in religious observance amongst Muslims living in the West since 9/11 (Merry, 2005 and Bagley & Al-Refai, 2014), parents exert greater agency in attempts to manage what their children are taught and socialised into (Niyoz & Memon, 2011). An ICM poll conducted in 2004 found 44% of respondents expressing the preference for their children to be educated in a Muslim school with the figure rising to 50% amongst under-34 year-olds (MacEoin, 2009). Motivations for establishing Muslim schools and sending children to them may include:-

1. The introduction and implementation of faith-based principles in education (Parker-Jenkins, 1995; Mustafa, 1999; Hewer, 2001; Fuess, 2007; Meer, 2009 and Berglund, 2014) that are absent in a state setting thus providing spiritual immunisation from that which might be perceived as sinful in lifestyle and/or secular in ideology (Hussain, 2004; Merry, 2005 & 2010 and Suleiman, 2012) and safeguarding from racism (Hussain, 2004 and Zine, 2011).
2. To separate genders (Mustafa, 1999; Merry, 2007; Coles, 2008; Panjwani, 2009; Meer, 2011; Parker-Jenkins, 2011 and Miah, 2015), especially for

sports and swimming (Driessen & Valkenberg, 2000) thus seeking to provide a safe environment for teenage boys and especially girls (Hewer, 2001 and Merry, 2005).

3. Specialist training in religious sciences (Haw, 1994 in Kucukcan, 1998 and Meer, 2009 and 2011) so that boys in particular can serve their communities as religious leaders (Hewer, 2001).

4. To preserve curricula preserving and imparting knowledge of Islamic civilisation, creed and culture past and present (Haw, 1994 in Kucukcan, 1998; Mustafa, 1999; Fuess, 2007; Merry, 2010 and Meer, 2011).

5. To increase expectations (Merry, 2005) and academic attainment (Mustafa, 1999; Driessen & Valkenberg, 2000 and Hewer, 2001), especially amongst boys (Meer, 2009 and 2011).

6. To avoid or adapt issues surrounding the teaching of taboo subjects in state settings such as sex education, art, dance and music (Driessen & Valkenberg, 2000; Merry, 2005; Coles, 2008; Niyoz & Memon, 2011 and Suleiman, 2012).

In spite of their altruistic ambitions, voices from inside and outside Muslim communities have raised concerns about Muslim schools. Families using the services of these institutions tend to be more orthodox or fundamentalist in belief than those traversing the state sector (Merry, 2005). This results in a primary criticism: Muslim schools indoctrinate pupils, foster segregation and hinder integration (Mustafa, 1999; Hussain, 2004; Panjwani, 2009 and Merry, 2010) resulting in “religious ghettos” (Zine, 2011) with a culture of “voluntary apartheid” (NUT, 1984 in Parker-Jenkins, 2011). In addition, concerns exist about the quality of education, specifically: insufficient expertise amongst teachers, inadequate facilities, scarce resources plus a lack of equal opportunities for girls (Mustafa, 1999) leading to “a narrow curriculum for domesticity” (Rendel, 1997 in Parker-Jenkins, 2011: 179). On these fronts, Merry’s assessment of the state of Muslim schools in the United States could be applicable to many in the UK:

Reports of inadequate administrative support, low pay, staff burnout and school board ineffectiveness are common, and teacher retention remains an ongoing challenge to Islamic schools... Moreover, independent Islamic schools face formidable financial problems... Very few Islamic schools, including those that are well established, are able to provide a school nurse, proper science lab facilities, social workers, music or fine art classes, special education services or guidance counselors. Most also do not have a library or extra-curricular activities.

(Merry, 2010: 28-29)

In addition to the above criticisms, Muslim parents sometimes view institutions and educators as saviour-like, safeguarding their children's religiosity (Merry, 2005 & 2010). As a consequence - and perhaps reflecting their own cultural experiences of education - parents become less active in supporting their children's studies (Ibid plus Driessen & Valkenberg, 2000) seeing themselves as more consumer than educative partner, deferring the role of teaching to professionals (Ahmed, 2013). This might be an unsurprising and perhaps inevitable state of affairs considering the increasing marketisation of education in both state, private and faith sectors. Furthermore, Muslim schools are often anchored around one ethnicity and could be seen as cultural as well as religious institutions (Hussain, 2004; see also: Kirkup, 2015) the majority in the UK cater to a predominantly Indian subcontinent school body (Ibid), a phenomenon replicated in the USA (Merry, 2010).

A final issue surrounding Muslim schools concerns the question of how authentically and exclusively Islamic their philosophy of education is (Panjwani, 2004 and Merry, 2010).⁹ Merry notes how "much of the language that Muslim schools adopt to convey their mission is unsurprisingly Western in origin" (2010: 60) and that practitioners "borrow heavily from public and private school curricula and textbooks" (2010: 61; see also Niyoz & Memon, 2011). Although referring to the American milieu, the same could be said of the UK - as will become evident in the case of Zamzam Primary. At a practical level, Muslim schools follow the national curriculum (Mustafa, 1999; Hussain 2004 and Lawson, 2005), a salient example being Kucukcan's study of a Turkish Muslim school in North London whose prospectus partitioned study time per week into approximately 75% national

⁹ A similar discussion has taken place amongst practitioners working in Catholic schools; see: Grace & O'Donoghue, 2004 and Arthur et al, 2007.

curriculum (18 hours) and the remainder Islamic Studies (8 hours) (1998). Some faith practitioners might argue that the secular and religious realms are inseparable (Arthur et al, 2007) and that a religious ethos should permeate every aspect of teaching and learning. Therefore, in practice, Kucukcan's neat 75:25 partition might be more fluid in many Muslim schools. The sceptic might thus ask: is there really much difference between a British Muslim school and a state school other than an externally Islamic "effect" (Panjwani, 2009)? Both models operate in an all-pervasive climate of neoliberalism in which the past "social and cultural objectives of education" have been superseded by the "economic goals of education," circumstances compounded by the financial crisis of the late 2000s (Betzel, 2013: 6). In addition, both models are also accountable to Ofsted, the government-appointed inspectorate, who impose increasingly rigid "accountability measures and greater prescriptive control over the curriculum" (Betzel, 2013: 7) as part of a process that "draws heavily on the notion of freedom in order to make the case for market-driven education reform as a means of providing choice and raising standards" (ibid). Therefore, it may well be likely that schools will internalise and reproduce mainstream educational philosophies and methods, either eagerly or expediently as "pragmatic survivors" (Grace, 2002: 192) in a process of "institutional isomorphism" (Breen, 2009: 1) – a concept to be discussed in detail later. And since "neoliberal political rationality produces governance criteria along the same lines, that is, criteria of productivity and profitability... governance talk becomes increasingly market-speak" (Brown, 2006: 694), one might expect to see the more "bellicose" language of competitive corporate management that has "colonised" contemporary school life (Grace, 2002: 180 and Grace & O'Donoghue, 2004: iv), in the policies, procedures and paraphernalia of the Muslim school as evidenced in Swain's research in the state sector:

"‘Achievement’; ‘best-practice’ ‘boys’-underachievement’; ‘comparisons’ ‘competition’ ‘effectiveness’; ‘examinations’; ‘hot squads’; ‘improvement’; ‘inspection’; ‘measurement’; ‘monitoring’; ‘National Curriculum’; ‘OFSTED’; ‘outcomes’; ‘performance’; ‘performance-related pay’; ‘planning’; ‘reward/punishment’; ‘results’; ‘rigorous’; ‘SATs’; ‘setting’; ‘shame and blame’; ‘standards’; ‘streaming’; ‘target-setting’; ‘testing’; ‘3-Rs’; ‘whole-class-teaching’; ‘whole-school-approach’; ‘zero-tolerance’."

(Swain, 2001: 68)

In my study I explore this "performativity culture" (Grace & O'Donoghue, 2004: iv)

and its accompanying language and practices. Some scholars have argued that it might be indicative of a contradiction inherent in Muslim, and indeed, faith-based schooling as a whole: by introducing initiates to such ideas (albeit, with an ‘Islamic twist’) pupils are inducted, perhaps inadvertently, into a neoliberal worldview in which “citizenship is portrayed as an utterly privatized affair whose aim is to produce competitive self-interested individuals vying for their own material and ideological gain” (Giroux, 2002: 429; see also: Gill, 1995 and Routledge, 2003 on “active individualism”). As a corollary to the above, this “culture of self-interest” also sees stakeholders, particularly parents, construed as consumers (Betzels, 2013: 6). Accordingly, one might ask if the anti-individualistic, anti-materialistic message of Islam is undermined (Panjwani, 2012a and 2012b)? Similar discussions have taken place amongst educators in Catholic schools with some seeing the corporate “colonisation” of education as un-Christian (Grace, 2002). Alternatively, does explicitly “spiritual schooling” offset and override such notions of commerce and competition by cultivating a sense of communality and spirit of compassion amongst pupils? Or are these seemingly diametrically opposed positions reconciled via “prosperity theology” in which material success is deemed indicative of divine approval (Hunt, 2000)? The faithful thus in theory learn to cognitively balance their “micro-hegemonies” (Blommaert & Varis, 2011) so in the case of Christian schools they can “talk Christ, walk corporate” (Brown, 2006) - a “third way” also advocated by some Muslim evangelists in which the spiritual and material are reconciled (Brown, 2016). Another question that may arise regarding state-funded Muslim schools is thus: does the acceptance of government funding compromise an institution’s religious philosophy of education and does this result in a “market advantage” over “competitors?” This appeared to be the case with the introduction of the option of grant maintained (GM) status (opting out of the control of Local Education Authorities and receiving a grant direct from central government) amongst Catholic schools in the 1990s: “... While the Catholic GM option was frequently taken for what the head teachers believed were reasons of equity, the GM status, once acquired, introduced inequity among Catholic schools” (Grace, 2002: 187). Irrespective of such speculation, there is certainly no British Muslim equivalent of Summerhill¹⁰ or the original Free Schools of the 1970s (De Castella,

¹⁰ An independent school famed for a revolutionary pupil-centered approach in which children were

2014). Perhaps religious minorities are still striving to find a foothold in the mainstream whilst the traditionally middle and upper class users of independent education are stable and solvent and can thus entertain and exercise the option of opting out.

In light of the above issues, Hussain deliberates over the appropriate definition of an Islamic school (2004). Lawson makes a distinction between the ideal of an Islamic school and a Muslim school: a Muslim school happens to be an educational establishment, state or independent, containing a significant number of Muslim pupils on roll (2005). An Islamic school, in theory at least, is an institution in which children are educated about Islam and into it (Berglund, 2014), its religious ethos embedded and apparent in its rules, routines and rituals (Lawson, 2005). While these descriptors are certainly open to discussion, for the sake of practicality and brevity I will circumvent the debate over the appropriateness of these titles. Therefore, throughout this thesis, I employ the commonly used term “Muslim school” (Lawson, 2005) to describe Zamzam Primary and other institutions of its ilk that attempt to impart an institutional understanding of Islam, although the two terms are used often and even interchangeably by many of my participants. In using such terminology, I acknowledge the Muslim school can be more of “an ideal and not an empirical category” to paraphrase Clarke (2011: 210), a subject discussed in greater detail in chapter 5. As a consequence, one might ask what type of Muslim school is being researched; as noted previously, many Muslim schools are not only largely mono-ethnic but also tend to impart one Islamic school of thought (Panjwani, 2012a). Moreover, which “authority” then determines the orthodoxy, authenticity and ultimately effectiveness of a Muslim school: parents and pupils, teachers and governors, imams or inspectors?¹¹ Furthermore, does societal superdiversity physically and psychologically penetrate such (potentially) mono-cultural spaces, or is the Muslim school envisioned as a vanguard against external ideas, establishments and individuals incongruent with orthodoxy? Perhaps the question to be asked is not whether a particular Muslim school is authentically Islamic, but rather, what is intended by the word “authentic”? Irrespective of these issues, for some Muslim

afforded the freedom to chose what to study and how.

¹¹ Clarke discusses some the issues that arise for anthropologists when addressing and assessing competing “visions” of Islam, be they “folk”, “local” or “elite” (2011).

parents, sending their child to a “safe-space” may suffice; others may harbour greater worldly ambitions for their children, which they strive to realise in an exacting manner, like parents from other migrant communities in the West such as the Chinese.

Having cast a critical gaze over existing literature of relevance to my study, I conclude this chapter by briefly returning to my original research questions. My investigation will be embedded in London: a global city, a neoliberal “non-place” characterised by its superdiversity with a sizeable and visible presence of minority ethnic and migrant families who see education as a route to social mobility. The urban backdrop of Queensbridge will frame my exploration of the educational aspirations of participants to gain a greater understanding of what motivates British Muslim families to pay for their children to attend a Muslim school in which they will study the national curriculum alongside Islam. Likewise, the thick description of ethnography will be used in this qualitative study to capture vividly the experiences and perceptions of children and teachers concerning Islamic education in Britain. I will also explore the broader issue of how a Muslim school, at an institutional and individual level, negotiates its ideological aim of implementing and imparting (an interpretation of) Islam with the practical requirements of operating within a neoliberal system. In the following chapter, I discuss in greater detail the specific method and methodology I will use to answer my research questions.

Chapter 3: Methodological Considerations

3.1 Introduction: Methods and Methodology

Methods are the technical rules that define proper procedures for gaining relevant and reliable knowledge. Methodology, meanwhile, is the broad theoretical and philosophical framework housing these methods granting them epistemological authority and legitimacy (Brewer, 2000: 2). Furthermore, methodology and method are so intertwined that, in the case of ethnography, it has been described as a perspective rather than a means of data collection although these features need to be clarified (Brewer, 2000: 7). For the purposes of this study, my research will be housed in a critical realist framework. I see this particular philosophical approach as a means to access and understand the deeper structures and mechanisms that become actualised in a real world setting, affecting outcomes and how they are perceived by actors who, in turn, possess the capacity to influence them - a distinct possibility within a research project of this nature, as will be shortly discussed. I begin this chapter with an introduction to critical realism followed by a discussion of ethnography before linking the two to my own research via the concept of reflexivity.

3.1. Critical Realism

Critical realism is a relatively new philosophical perspective (McEvoy & Richards, 2006) and owes its popularity to the pioneering work of Roy Bhaskar. It is a departure from mainstream realist thought wherein “closed system” approaches popularised by Popper (Mir & Watson, 2011) saw theories falsified as opposed to proven or, as Bhaskar notes: “What distinguishes the phenomena the scientists actually produce out of the phenomena they could produce is that, when their experiment is successful, it is an index of what they do not produce” (2011: 15). Critical realism has been thought of as a “Copernican Revolution” (Houston, 2001; see also Mir & Watson, 2011 and Bhaskar himself, 2011) and after Bhaskar’s work includes subsequent additions from Margaret Archer and Andrew Sayer (Kemp, 2005). Critical realism has been described as a philosophy (Yeung, 1997 and Williams, 2013); a philosophical rather than scientific ontology (Steinmetz, 1998); ontology and an epistemology (Han, 2002) as well as a post-positivist philosophy of science (Porter, 2002; Klein, 2004 and McEvoy & Richards, 2006). Klein muses that

ultimately it is “hard to pin down a concrete concept of critical realism” and “in spite of its focus on ontology” its position “remains ambiguous” (2004: 130). Perhaps one can borrow from Corson who posits that critical realism is based on a theory of being and that this ontological theory presupposes an epistemological theory (1997).

Yeung expands upon the two concepts summarising this scientific philosophy as follows: -

1. Acknowledges the existence of reality independent of human consciousness (realist ontology).
2. Attributing causal powers to human reason and social structures (realist ontology).
3. A rejection of relativism in social and scientific discourses (realist epistemology).
4. A reorientation of the social sciences towards their emancipatory goals (realist epistemology).¹²

(Yeung, 1997: 52)

Critical realism is concerned with ontological realism: there is a differentiated, structured and layered reality independent of the mind (Patomaki & Wight, 2000). It accepts epistemological relativism in that “all beliefs are socially produced, so that all knowledge is transient, and neither truth-values nor criteria of rationality exist outside historical time” (Bhaskar, 2011: 23). It also entails a judgmental rationalism – that one can provide rationalised explanations preferring one theory to another (Patomaki & Wight, 2000). As a corollary to the first argument, critical realists may possess the conviction that a “reality” exists “out there” (Houston, 2001) but this does not entail the assumption that complete knowledge of its workings is possible: a “post-postmodernist position” (Brewer, 2000). For critical realists starting with Bhaskar, this external “reality” has been divided into three levels: -

1. The empirical i.e. what is experienced and/or observed.
2. The actual i.e. the events that occur whether experienced or not.
3. The real or causal i.e. the mechanisms of objects and/or agents that cause events.
(Steinmetz, 1998; Houston, 2001; Han, 2002; Klein, 2004; McEvoy & Richards, 2006; Kontos & Poland, 2009 and Al-Amoudi & Willmott, 2011)

Although the causal plane may not be open to direct perception, it is real and “distinct from and greater than the domain of the empirical” (Bhaskar, 1998: xiii in Houston, 2001, 850). This is where advocates of critical realism take umbrage with

¹² “The philosophers have only *interpreted* the world, in various ways; the point is to *change* it” (Marx & Engels, 1974: 123).

the “closed systems” employed in research in the natural sciences (Scott, 1995, Han, 2002 and McEvoy & Richards, 2006) for collapsing three domains of reality into one (Bhaskar, 2011). In response to the “orthodox tradition in the philosophy of science” which interprets the “actuality of causal laws” as “empirical regularities” (2011: 21), Bhaskar offers an expanded critique below:

In the ideology of empiricism the world is regarded as flat, uniform, unstructured and undifferentiated: it consists solely of atomistic events or states of affairs which are constantly conjoined, so occurring in closed systems. Such events and their constant conjunctions are known by asocial, atomistic individuals who passively sense (or apprehend) these given facts and register their constant conjunctions... Facts usurp the place of things, conjunctions that of causal laws and automata those of people, as reality is defined in terms of the cosmic contingency of human sense-experience.

(Bhaskar, 2011: 8-9)

The “predictive” laws of “if A is present then B occurs” conceived, constructed and conducted in closed systems (a euphemism for the laboratory experiment) are unavailable to those operating in the social sciences (i.e. ethnography) and the conclusions derived from them cannot be conflated (Mir & Watson, 2001). Causal laws (as empirical regularities) are reduced to constant conjunctions of events and from constant conjunctions of events to experiences (Bhaskar, 2011). The positivist approach thus sees ontology reduced to epistemology: from “what is to what can be known” (Lovell, 1980: 11). Bhaskar called this the “epistemic fallacy” (2011:13; see also Al-Amoudi & Willmott, 2011) which:

Covers or disguises an implicit ontology based on the category of experience, and an implicit realism based on the presumed characteristics of the objects of experience, viz. atomistic events, and their relations, constant conjunctions.

(Bhaskar, 2011: 18)

In response to the above concerns, critical realism seeks to identify what “governs phenomena in open systems” which constitute “the vast majority of cases” researched (Bhaskar, 2011: 16). In constructing explanations for such phenomena, Bhaskar (following Hanson) called this movement “retroduction” (Bhaskar, 2011: 19; see also: McEvoy & Richards, 2006 and Rees & Gatenby, 2014) in which the “subject and object” binary is jettisoned, the multiple (unperceived) processes underlying events are acknowledged and agents make inferences in which premises do not fully entail conclusions (Downward, Finch & Ramsey, 2002). Houston

presents a practical example of these underlying processes: the force of magnetism as the causal mechanism for the movement and arrangement of iron filings in a particular pattern as detected at the empirical level (2001) whilst Porter suggests gravity (2002). Meanwhile, Al-Amoudi & Willmott devise the hypothetical tale of “Sally” consuming a drink to explain the causal powers underlying the stratification of reality. The empirical domain can be described as Sally’s personal perception of the beverage’s temperature (experience); the actual, her drink burning her lips (events and experiences) and the real, the molecular structure of the drink that made it prone to variations in temperature (mechanisms + events and experiences) (2011). Such mechanisms are considered distinct from the events they generate just as events are distinct from the experiences in which they are apprehended (Ibid). Critical realists are thus especially attentive to these structures and mechanisms, more so than the aforementioned observable events (Steinmetz, 1998 and McEvoy & Richards, 2006), attempting to understand and explain them alongside their accompanying tendencies (Houston, 2001). By extension, in the social world, innate psychological mechanisms as well as wider social ones will influence people’s actions; consequently, the actor can transform this domain and is in turn transformed by it (Corson, 1997 and Houston, 2001), an issue of relevance in ethnography that will be attended to shortly.

Presently, I return to Patomaki and Wright’s take on epistemological relativism. They posit that historically and culturally partial processes of interrogation mediate the process of reproductive judgement, by which generative mechanisms are identified (2000). For example, had Sally lived in differing periods of time with evolving scientific understandings she might have attributed the cooling of her coffee to the weakening of the element of fire, the transfer of kinetic energy or particle vibrations – “historically contingent explanations of certain states of affairs” (Al-Amoudi & Willmott, 2011: 8). The criteria employed for preferring one explanation to another is dependent, in part, on the circumstances and schema of the community in which the discussion occurred. O’Regan notes that what is absent from critical realist thought is “some explanation of how we can be historically, ideologically and discursively located beings and yet still be able to make foundational truth claims” (2005: 577 in Al-Amoudi & Willmott 2011: 27). This specific concern segues neatly to general criticisms of critical realism. Kemp asserts

that critical realism's ontological arguments convince in the natural sciences (the very field critiqued by critical realists for its reliance on closed systems) but their persuasiveness is dependent on the empirical success of scientific arguments they are derived from. These ontological arguments act as a route to success and unification in, as yet, unsuccessful areas of research. Yet, a convincing ontology can only be established once empirical research in a particular area is successful, and there is a degree of unity in acknowledging this success. (2005: 186). Gunn voices similar concerns: there are observable phenomena (the empirical) and generative mechanisms; a generative mechanism is truthfully identified when it successfully explains the phenomena, but the criterion for truthfully identifying the phenomena can only appeal to some generative mechanism (1989: 109). Put simply, "only appearances can serve as a guide to reality and only reality can serve as the yardstick against which... appearance is to be judged" (1989: 111). Gunn labels this issue as a "vicious circularity" (ibid.) while Kemp calls it critical realism's "paradox" (2005: 186).

As noted earlier, Bhaskar has critiqued that mainstay of the empirical natural sciences, the constant conjunction form, arguing that it concealed "the reality of structures irreducible to events" and of "social structures to human actions" and "societies to individuals" thus cutting "the ground from under the possibility of the social sciences, and so of any route to human emancipation" (2011: 9). Al-Amoudi & Wilmot thus lament critical realism's subsequent failure to realise its "unrealised emancipatory potential" adding the warning that:

If it is not to perpetuate what it strives to discredit, critical realism must become more consistently reflexive in applying the strictures of epistemological relativism to its own claims. Instead of regarding critical realism as THE means of accessing the real, it is more coherent to represent critical realism as one of the possibilities for discursively constructing the real.

(Al-Amoudi & Wilmot, 2011: 29)

Perhaps one could, as Al-Amoudi & Willmott do, acknowledge the shortcomings of critical realism but adopt an "optimistic reading" of it as "an ongoing project" as opposed to a "fixed canon" (2011: 29). As Bhaskar noted, "social scientific, unlike natural scientific, theory is *necessarily* incomplete" (2011, 85) and, unlike the natural sciences, "*cannot be predictive*" and therefore "must be *exclusively*

explanatory” (2011: 83 – his italics). The idea of an evolving understanding links neatly to the social science of ethnography in which theories will be “built” as opposed to “tested” starting with the “emic” perspective of participants - “the insider’s or native’s perspective of reality” (Freeman, 1989: 30; see also: Sharpe, 2005) - a concept addressed in the discussion of ethnography below.

3.2 Ethnography

Having stated my intention to house this study in a critical realist framework, I now introduce and explain the specific method of research used in this qualitative study: ethnography. Ethnography is “the study of the socio-cultural contexts, processes, and meanings within cultural systems” (Whitehead, 2005: 4). It portrays humans as actors maneuvering through social worlds, casting illumination upon the minutiae of everyday lives and life within a wider realm (Schostak, 2002). For some, such as social constructivists, culture itself is more verb than noun, “it never is, it does” (Heath et al, 2008: 6; see also: Street & Thompson, 1993) – a view I hold myself. Ethnography can be summarised as follows: it is inductive and deductive. It consists of multiple research methods - both qualitative and quantitative - and diverse forms of data (Walford, 2001). It is theoretical and descriptive. The ethnographer not only observes but also engages with actors and activities being investigated. The ethnographer is thus the “instrument” (Walford, 2001 and Whitehead, 2005) and “primary source of data” (Woods, 1994: 313). Participant accounts have a high status (Walford, 2001) although are far from infallible (Block, 2000) whilst interactions with informants generate and erect analytical frameworks used to understand and portray the phenomena studied (Gold, 1997). Ethnography is a cycle of hypothesis and theory construction (Walford, 2001) making it emergent and malleable (Schensul et al, 2013 and Walford, 2007). Ethnography aims to “discover how people in the study area classify or label each other, how they find meaning in activities they care about in life, and how they engage in processes in which they individually and collectively define” (Gold, 1997: 391). Historically, anthropological ethnography was “often missionary and colonial in character” (Barron, 2013: 118; see also: Porter, 2002 and Rees & Gatenby, 2014 on “academic imperialism”) with the “field” a fixed location (Heath et al, 2008) in which ethnographers acting as “lone ranger” scholars (Scales, 2008) would experience culture shock studying “the other” prompting a re-evaluation of their own beliefs (Delamont, 2002).

Contemporary ethnography is more a study of people “on the move”: taking interest in “the social place, the history and formation of the sign-makers, and in the social environments in which they make their signs” (Kress & Street, 2006 in Heath et al, 2008: 23), as will be the case with this investigation set within the Queensbridge community.

The word “Ethnography” is a portmanteau of “ethnos and graph, i.e. “writing the people” (Mills & Morton, 2013: 22). As a response to chauvinistic constructions of the Non-Western “Other”, ethnography underwent a “full swing across the spectrum of epistemological confidence” (Porter, 2002: 53) with a subsequent metamorphosis of researchers from authorities to authors (Rees & Gatenby, 2014). Ethnographic writing is now commonly understood to be “contextual, rhetorical, institutional, generic and political” depicting the stories of actors as “true fictions,” (Clifford, 1986: 6; see also: Barron, 2013), an outlook echoed in Delamont & Atkinson’s admission that ethnography is “inescapably rhetorical” (1995: 49 in Mills & Morton, 2013: 22). The ethnographer essentially renders and frames a world in their words; they are both scientists and storytellers (Brewer, 2000 and Walford, 2001) who are “writing culture” (Clifford, 1986) although this view has been critiqued by the likes of Porter as relativist (1993). Ethnographic “truths” can thus be perceived as “inherently partial - committed and incomplete” (Clifford & Marcus, 1986: 3 in Mills & Morton, 2013) – an outlook that can be aligned with a critical realist view (as mentioned in chapter 3.1) in which beliefs are socially produced, knowledge is transient and truth-values alongside rationality criteria are located within historical time (Bhaskar, 2011: 23). One might characterise ethnography by its following features:-

1. Focusing on people’s ordinary activities in naturally occurring settings.
 2. Using unstructured and flexible methods of data collection.
 3. Requiring researchers to be actively involved in the field with those being studied.
 4. Exploring meanings human activity has for individuals and wider society.
- (Brewer, 2000: 19)

Advocates of positivism might argue that the subjective nature of ethnography means it falls beneath the exacting standards of the natural sciences (Brewer, 2000) with criticisms pertaining to validity, reliability and replication (Heath et al, 2008).

For example, some critics have argued that the reliability demanded by other disciplines in collecting and interpreting data is not a requisite of ethnography; specifically, ethnography “describes and measures ... by means of extracts of natural language... Such data can appear as ‘too subjective’ and contrast unfavourably with numerate data, which appear to be more objective” (Brewer, 2000: 21). Moreover, experimental replication is an impossible ideal as “every field immersion is unique”, preventing transfer to other settings and the possibility of informing policy and practice (Walford, 2007). The critical realist ethnographer might retort that positivist “closed system” approaches are inappropriate for the social sciences anyway, circumstances compounded by their neglect of underlying structures and causal mechanisms. In a further endorsement of their own approach, the critical realist might add that rather than test theories; ethnographers build them (Heath et al, 2008 and Schensul et al, 2013), explaining rather than predicting, describing and deconstructing social behaviour (Rees & Gatenby, 2014). In addition, the ethnographer can only chronicle what happens as opposed to what does not; consequently, vigilance regarding the ethnographer’s beliefs in allowing what should be, cannot overcome the accuracy of dealing with what is (Heath et al, 2008). Another concern pertaining to ethnography is the “Hawthorn Effect,” a phrase used to describe how the presence of observers can change the way those observed behave (Carspecken & Walford, 2001; 52).¹³ As noted earlier, the ethnographer is confronted by the potential paradox of being both observer and participant; they are “a variable in the experiment”, (Brewster, 2000: 20), a position rarely encountered or simply denied in the natural science (positivism) model of research, as noted earlier by Bhaskar. This presents one of many considerations for my own research that will be addressed in more detail in chapter 4.

Since ethnographic representations of reality are “partial, partisan and selective” (Brewer, 2000: 127) - and therefore, perhaps congruent with Al-Amoudi & Wilmot’s view whereby critical realists discursively construct the real - the researcher must establish the rationale and rubric of investigation from the outset (Heath et al, 2008).

¹³ Concerning his ethnographic study of a (self-described) Christian Fundamentalist school, Peshkin notes how he eventually became “appropriately unobtrusive” whilst acknowledging the inevitability of the field researcher’s footprint: “BBA was not unchanged by my presence during the three semesters I was there on a daily basis, but I doubt that it was perceptibly different after the first month even to those who knew it best” (1986: 22).

A critical realist perspective thus allows for ethnography to be housed in an ontological, methodological and epistemological framework that links “subjective understandings of individuals with the structural positions within which those individuals are located” (Rees & Gatenby, 2014: 4). The investigator can validate their research by synthesising emic and etic perspectives (Fetterman, 1989 and Whiteman, 2005). The etic, or constant comparative viewpoint is the “external, social scientific perspective on reality” (Fetterman, 1989: 32) and helps to understand underlying actions, patterns and features. In perhaps another link to critical realism’s interest in underlying processes, Heath et al note how “thick description” can be a means for the ethnographer to “get at the patterns behind how a specific action takes place in terms of its context” (2008: 41). Meanwhile, the emic or locally held perspective is at the core of most ethnographic research (Ibid) and is that body of knowledge of an individual, group or institution - a school, for example - that has been established from an etic/comparative analysis (Heath et al, 2008). In this study, I foreground the emic perspective of my participants - including myself as an employee of Zaytuna Primary – whilst synthesising the data with my etic view as (participant) researcher, striving to provide analysis that maintains a disciplined subjectivity.

Having completed data collection, the ethnographer might encounter challenges pertaining to data analysis, interpretation and reportage. One response, is to adopt a “post-modern” approach to ethnography, the end product of which is a “cooperatively evolved text” that privileges discourse over gospel truths; prioritises “dialogues not monologue” and emphasises cooperation and collaboration over the avowals of a “transcendental observer” (Clifford, 1986: 125) who is the “guarantor of evidence” (Gertz 1988 in Schostak, 2002: 165; see also: Bhaskar, 2011 and Barron, 2013). On this topic, Spencer observes “The view from nowhere was in fact always a view from somewhere” (2001: 444) whilst Sharpe would argue that the critical realist ethnographer’s view is both “‘up in the clouds,’ dealing with abstract and theoretical conceptualization of the issue at hand” and “‘down to earth’ looking for the specific differences within and across cases, investigating the existing contingencies and their intention with the postulated mechanisms” (2005, 8). Conversely, one could argue that however much consideration the ethnographer exercises towards one’s “co-authors”, it is ultimately the researcher who exercises

editorial control. Arguing their position, the critical realist ethnographer may advocate that immersion in the field entailing “direct, detailed and sustained contact with individuals over time” lends itself to the “retroductive process” (Rees & Gatenby, 2014: 7). Critical realism can thus act as “connective tissue” linking data collected to historical, economic and social contexts (Rees & Gatenby, 2014: 7), a metaphorical anchor against the swells of phenomenological subjectivities and postmodernist relativism (Porter, 2002).

Perhaps the above solutions can be distilled into one compound: reflexivity, as advocated by the likes of Sharpe (2005), Whitehead (2005), Lumsden (2009) and Williams (2013) and even referred to in an earlier ethnography by Eickelman (1985). In practical terms, this keyword can be explained as ethnographers disclosing the self-perceptions, methodological setbacks and psychology that influenced their collection, interpretation and representation of data; an acknowledgment that they are part of the world they study (O’Reilly, 2002 and Lumsden, 2009) and subsequent agency in constructing that “reality” (Sharpe, 2005). Hammersley’s musing that “no knowledge is certain, but knowledge claims can be judged reasonably accurately in terms of their likely truth” (1960: 60 in Brewer, 2000: 122) resonates at this juncture. Reflexivity - whilst not a solution, per se - is a proactive and popular response to such uncertainty (Roberts & Sanders, 2005). By acknowledging, embracing and making explicit the partial nature of data, the ethnographer can authenticate and augment their work (Brewer, 2000), “a rigorous sense of partiality” being “a source of representational tact” (Clifford, 1986: 7 in O’Reilly, 2012: 220). How does one become that effective reflective/reflexive practitioner? Heath et al provide a list of questions the ethnographer can ask him or herself: -

1. Who or what is the phenomenon of central focus/what are its salient features?
2. Who am I with respect to these individuals, the group, or the sites?
3. What are the times and spaces of data collecting going to be?
4. What makes me curious about what is happening here?
5. What will I be consistently able to tell others about who I am and what will I be doing here?
6. How will I protect the identity and interests of those whose lives I propose to examine?

(Heath et al, 2008: 46)

In this way, a rigorous approach to ethnographic study can hopefully be ensured. The

outcomes, however, may be less certain.

This all leads to a final reflection concerning the potential tension when adopting a critical realist framework to comprehend the data harvested in an ethnographic study, plus other issues of authenticity and accuracy specific to this investigation. Having previously addressed the critical realist preoccupation with “underlying processes,” one might suspect that a dichotomy exists on account of the ethnographer’s preoccupation and portrayal of the outward and apparent: the articulations and actions of participants and the appearance and ambience of the domains they traverse. By adopting a critical realist stance, the ethnographer may attempt to excavate the underlying structures that both enable or constrain human agency, and are perhaps reproduced or transformed by them (Sharpe, 2005). The ethnographer embarks on their course understanding that participant accounts are the starting point but not the final destination of research (Ibid) and that these accounts can be partial, misguided (McEvoy & Richards, 2006) or even “veridically suspect” (Block, 2000: 758) and thus open to contestation. Taking participants “at their word” (Freeman, 1996 in Block, 2000: 757) can thus be an issue for the researcher, with an “uncritical acceptance of subjects’ own accounts being “the Achilles heel of phenomenological ethnography” (Sharpe, 2005: 8). For example, Hockey’s study of British soldiers on duty in Northern Ireland (1986) prioritised participant subjectivities but neglected structural analysis (Porter, 2002) whilst Willis’s “Learning to Labour” (1977) has been critiqued for exhibiting biases towards the accounts of particular participants, evidence of Earren and Karner’s “over-rapport” (2009: 141 in Mann, 2011: 15).

Regardless, any resulting tautness can be relaxed firstly, through acknowledgement of its existence, and secondly, by comprehending ideas, events and environments as expressed and understood by actors, to be “discursive fields” (Weedon, 1997 and Block, 2006). As stated previously, a substantial amount of data in this project was collected via interview, yet, “the interviewer can never reasonably assume that interviews are clean and easy information transfers providing interviewers with windows on the minds of the interviewees” (Block, 2006: 69). Furthermore, the life story of the participant can be depicted as “an oral unit of social interaction” (Linde, 1993: 20), refracted through the prism-like researcher/interviewer dynamic. Thus,

“the reportability of a given event or sequence of events is not fixed; it depends not only on the nature of the events, but also on the relation of the speaker and addressee(s)” (Ibid: 22). There is also a view of interview talk as “discursive fields” or “competing ways of giving meaning to the world and organizing social institutions and processes” (Weedon, 1997: 34). In referring to the plausibility of an idea or position within its realm, discursive fields can be seen as:

A particular voice which a particular speaker has adopted momentarily with a view to projecting a particular subjectivity. And the sum total of subjectivities embodied by an individual at a given time constitute her/his individual identity.

(Block, 2006: 69)

Linking these reflections to this study itself, I posed a question in the literature review: which “authority” then determines the orthodoxy, authenticity and ultimately the effectiveness of a Muslim school: parents and pupils, teachers and governors, imams or inspectors? This will become a recurrent theme throughout my data analysis, especially in Chapter 5: The Muslim School. Another area in which questions of authenticity will arise are in the actual participant accounts. Throughout my data analysis I will use critical realism as a tool to unpack and understand the layers and nuances inherent in my discussions with informants, focusing especially on the potential disconnect between the empirical and actual domains. I will acknowledge that these representations of reality are “partial, partisan and selective” (Brewer, 2000: 127) and that I have attempted to gather, interpret and frame the different versions of “truth” held by participants - be they parents, pupils or practitioners – as they were presented to me whilst acknowledging that this is *a*, rather than, *the* definitive picture of life in Zamzam Primary School. In understanding interview data generated in collaboration with participants to be representative of subjectivities, overall *subjective* understandings of authenticity are thus foregrounded over any (uncapturable) *objective* accuracy at the micro-level.

To conclude: in this study, critical realism will be employed not just as a means to collect data but as a sociological practice, “linking observed accounts to context, and explaining rather than merely describing social phenomena” (Rees & Gatenby, 2014: 13). Critical realist ethnography will adhere to the following core tenets: -

1. It will hold to a stratified emergent ontology, with a materialist view of history as its foundation.
2. It will take structures and generative mechanisms as its objects of enquiry.
3. It will understand events as the outcome of multiple causal processes.

(Rees & Gatenby, 2014: 13)

In authoring this study featuring ethnographic perspectives underpinned by critical realism, I have sought to be reflective and reflexive, balancing authenticity with accuracy and communicating the above at all times. Nevertheless, any understanding of “reality” I have arrived at will have been built not tested, proposed not proven, seeking to “create coherence” to paraphrase Linde (1993).

3.31 Research Design: The Pilot Study

Having reviewed existing literature concerning issues associated with my area of investigation alongside the methods and methodology I intend to employ, the remainder of this chapter discusses the design of my investigation. Before focusing on the pilot study it may be timely to first revisit my research questions:

1. What are the perceptions of teachers, parents and past pupils regarding the role and purpose of a Muslim faith school in the London borough of Queensbridge?

1.1 What ideologies and discourses underpin Muslim faith schools?

1.2 What tensions, if any, exist between government education policy and the conceptions of stakeholders in Muslim faith schools?

2. What are the motivations of key stakeholders – teachers, parents, past pupils – in relation to the role and purpose of a Muslim faith school in the London borough of Queensbridge?

2.1 Why do teachers choose to work in a Muslim school?

2.2 Why do parents choose to send their children to a Muslim faith school?

2.3 What are the views of past pupils who have studied in a Muslim faith school?

Having successfully completed my upgrade from MPhil to PhD and received ethical clearance, I began my research proper in 2015 attempting to answer the questions above. Following my experiences conducting Masters level research in the same study site with similar groups of participants, I made purposeful decisions regarding my approach to collecting data, especially in relation to parents in the Queensbridge community. More specifically, this was the choice to use recorded interviews as opposed to questionnaires, a pragmatic choice based on the fact that English was an additional language for many parents, some children and in a few cases, even teachers and governors - all to varying degrees of ability. Not surprisingly, this carried implications for whom I interviewed, as a sufficient level of competency in spoken English would also be required for interviews to function successfully. Moreover, I had found during my MA research and even more so as a teacher working in Zamzam Primary that parental engagement with school and staff was not particularly high (for example, participation in workshops, attending assemblies and volunteering in classes) and thus letters, questionnaires, workshops and the like yielded low rates of response and participation. Whilst issues surrounding language proficiency and engagement were not necessarily applicable to teaching staff and former pupils, I still opted for face-to-face interviews as I felt this was the best way to maintain consistency and to elicit narratives and ideas from the remainder of my participants.

I conducted a large pilot study consisting of thirteen interviews with fourteen participants during the summer term in the 2014/15 academic year at Zamzam Primary. Some participants were asked to attend interview by phone, some by email but the majority of initial invitations occurred in person during routine daily interactions in the workplace. For similar reasons, the majority of interviews with participants were conducted in ZPS on Friday afternoons when the school is officially closed, the exceptions being interviews with three informants. These meetings took place at the university I study at, UCL Institute of Education, primarily because the three participants were no longer involved in school life in their roles of teaching assistant, governor and pupil respectively, but also because the

building is located in central London and thus equidistant for all involved in the interview process. Cognisant of impending changes of circumstances for many other individuals involved with Zamzam Primary, I decided to conduct as many interviews as I could at this admittedly early stage of my research. For example, I was aware as an employee of the school that four teaching participants would cease to have any involvement with Zamzam Primary following the end of the 2014/15 academic year, so this was an ideal opportunity to generate data with them.

3.32 Research Design: Interview Structure and Technique

Whilst all participants included in this study were eager to assist my research, some possessed more outgoing personalities and were more forthcoming in sharing experiences and opinions than others; as a result, interviews lasted anywhere between fifteen minutes to one and a half hours. All conversations took place on a one to one basis with two exceptions: the first being my dialogue with a fourteen year-old former pupil whose older brother was present - but not directly participating per se (although it is certainly feasible that his presence could have indirectly influenced his sister's remarks) - having escorted her to the interview site at UCL IOE. The other exception was a "group" interview conducted with the year 1 and the year 2 teacher, more so out of convenience (as mentioned earlier) although the presence of three individuals (one of whom being myself) did assist in facilitating lively discussion and therefore the production of a significant amount of data. I would go on to replicate this approach with one family (two parents, one child) in the main study for similar reasons. Another three interviews in the main study were conducted slightly differently due to the availability of participants: two by email (in which informants responded in writing to my questions) and one by Skype. In all cases, ethical procedures were carefully adhered to with all requisite paperwork and preamble complete before initiating interviews. Participants were required to read the letter of introduction with subsequent opportunity provided to ask any questions before the interview started. I also explained that participants were present of their own volition and could leave at any juncture without explanation. In the case of young participants, parents and/or carers were consulted first and asked to sign permission slips on behalf of children before any conversation commenced. I also provided participants opportunities to share verbal feedback upon completion of the interview.

My semi-structured interview technique did not involve a pre-written set of questions, prompts or cue cards to assist the process. Rather I used my existing knowledge of the Queensbridge community and locality, Zamzam Primary and, in a number of cases, my participants' personalities and life circumstances, to inform and guide the process, responding reflexively to ideas and issues as they arose. All lines of investigation were thus deliberate, purposeful and linked back to my original research questions. Consequently, the broad themes addressed in my interviews were as follows:-

1. The drivers for parents and educators to become involved in a faith school.
2. The ethos and environment of the faith school.
3. The faith school's embeddedness within the wider community,
4. Everyday life in the local borough of Queensbridge and a superdiverse global city.
5. How "doing" faith education impacts upon pupils.
6. The positive and negative aspects of teaching and or learning in a faith school.
7. The similarities and differences between a faith school and secular state schools.
8. Personal experiences and anecdotes of faith education.
9. Finally, the influence of external organisations, institutions and infrastructures on the faith school.

The above themes would act as starting points to address other issues in greater detail. Naturally, the themes addressed differed in various degrees of coverage, dependent upon the participant being interviewed; for example, the first question concerning parental motivations for participating in faith based education would not be posed during discussions with pupil participants. Conversely, point six addressing positives and negatives of life at ZPS was of relevance to all informants and thus pursued. During the interview process, I also ensured interactions were as much participant-led as possible, with my role being more facilitator than interviewer, responding to any ideas, observations and experiences articulated with further probing.

3.33 Transcriptions and Analysis

I spent the summer of 2015 personally transcribing the thirteen interviews. From the outset, I chose to represent my interaction with informants using low-level transcription in a manner not dissimilar to how Peshkin recorded the experiences, ideologies and opinions of his participants at his research site – a fundamentalist Christian school in the USA (1986). However, whereas the tone of Peshkin's transcription was more a series of monologues and personal reflections, mine took a dialogical form with greater researcher interaction with my informants. This decision to employ low level transcription was rooted in a desire to foreground ethnographic content as opposed to engage in critical discourse analysis as might be the case with sociolinguists or applied linguists. Nevertheless, general extenders, pauses, stutters, laughter, repetition and interruptions were all included in transcripts in an attempt to convey the unkemptness of real world conversation.

My first step in analysing data was to colour code each interview highlighting salient themes. Three main categories emerged from the data: Parents, Education and Islam with two subordinate categories: Mainstream and Minorities, with a colour applied to each for ease of referencing. As I analysed the interviews, subcategories were added where pertinent, for example, "Parenting & Socio-Economics, Education & Vocation and Islam & Identity." In all instances, I operated *posteriori* with data generating classification as opposed to my devising categories beforehand and searching for examples within the transcripts. In some instances, thematic mirroring occurred, for example, "Parenting & Education" with "Education & Parenting." In these cases, I placed the category I deemed to be of greater relevance at that point of discussion first; for example, an extract pertaining to the experience of parents when educating children would result in its being categorised as "Parenting & Educating." Conversely, when education was the main focus of conversation with elements of parenting secondary then this particular segment would be ordered as "Education & Parenting." Some categorisation involved anything up to five labels placed in descending order of importance.

With such extensive and intricate categorisation, colour coding proved insufficient. As a solution, I employed other forms of signposting such as bold, italicised and underlined typefaces or combinations of the above. Whilst this approach cast some

illumination on the ideas and opinions expressed in interviews, the sheer volume and variation of categories and sub-categories conspired to create a somewhat overwhelming imbroglia of information. These circumstances were compounded by my use of Microsoft Word, a word processing package with a limited array of colours, symbols and icons with which to code my data. Despite these drawbacks, my initial overview did prove productive in highlighting salient themes throughout the interviews. However, I still felt that the data collected could be unpicked further and thus opted to engage in key word analysis. In retrospect, I found the key word analysis far more useful in identifying the recurrence of specific themes, thoughts and phrases than colour-coded classification. My method was to pay close attention to the transcribed discussion and whenever an interviewee mentioned something relating to either the overarching themes of the study (i.e. “education”, “Islam” etc.) or its intricate details (“inspection”, “outcomes”, “attainment” etc.) I would classify it as a key word and log it into a matrix that grew exponentially. Any future occurrence of a key word would be logged in a tally chart format making it easy for me to identify which words featured prominently within and across the interviews. With such a vast amount of transcribed material containing many potential key words to choose from, I initially cast my net wide to ensure my options were open, so that I did not miss out on valuable data. Nevertheless, what grounded my search for key words was their connection back to my original research questions. For example, key words such as “money”, “career” and “opportunity” linked back to research question 2.1 that explored the motivations for teachers to seek employment in a Muslim school. In this way I could organise relevant data and omit what was surplus to requirements. Inevitably, certain key words found in the transcripts of semi-structured interviews occurred with great frequency, for example, “children,” “families,” “schools,” and “teachers” as one might expect. However, the key words I found to be of greatest interest were less generic, more specific to my original research questions and thus meriting further analysis, for example, “inspection”, “curriculum”, “outstanding” and “bubble” amongst others.

3.34 Pilot Study Impact on the Design of the Main Study

Following the completion of the pilot study and accompanying transcription and data analysis, I was satisfied with the general quality, quantity and relevance of data produced in a collaborative and active process of meaning-making venture (Holstein

and Gubrium, 1995 in Mann, 2011) that sought to answer my research questions. For this reason, I have included interviews from my pilot study in the overall body of data analysis chapters 4-8. Nevertheless, I did feel my interview technique in the pilot study could be formalised in the main study to guard against Earren and Karner's "over-rapport" (2009: 141 in Mann, 2011: 15). I was particularly concerned that this phenomenon had manifested in my interview with KS1 teachers Rumaysah and Sumayah, born of an existing and amicable relationship with two extroverted work colleagues with a shared experience of Somali cultures. In anticipation of the main study, I made three main adjustments to my interview technique: firstly, to write down questions in advance ensuring they were specific to the relevant participant group: pupil, parent or teacher. Secondly, I paid close attention to potential priming of participants, avoiding carelessly worded questions that may have lead the discussion in a particular direction. I also opted for more open-ended responses to participants ("interesting", "explain more", "really" and "okay"). Lastly, I would alter the actual process of transcription and text organisation, using NVivo software to code and inspect the content created in interviews thus making data analysis an easier prospect than sifting through Word documents.

Another amendment I made took place during the process of data analysis: whilst closely examining the content of interviews it occurred to me that my research was not just a study of a Muslim school but of a workplace. In particular, it was participants' grievances with inaccessible management, insincere colleagues and limited finances that crystallised the notion that ZPS shared characteristics with secular institutions and their accompanying office politics. I subsequently revisited literature concerning critical realist ethnography and specifically that which focused on the contemporary workplace. Whilst I examined a number of studies by the likes of Porter (1993), Sharpe (2005), McEvoy & Richards (2006) and Rees & Gattenby (2014), I found Vincent and Wapshott's work on organisational case studies (2014) to be especially relevant. Of particular interest was their four-quadrant matrix developed as a tool to understand causal mechanisms for events and processes in organisations. Before discussing this model further - specifically developed for the study of organisations using critical realism - I include an explanatory diagram below:

Figure 2: Significant Types of Causal Mechanism
(Adapted from Vincent and Wapshott, 2014: 151)

	Normative Powers and Potentials	Configurational Powers and Potentials
Upwards Causation	<p>Upwards normative causes</p> <p>Internal normative routines active within and affecting the institutional mechanism observed</p>	<p>Upwards configurational causes</p> <p>Internal organisational configurations which articulate the institutional mechanism observed</p>
Downwards Causation	<p>Downwards normative causes</p> <p>Extra-organisational norms which shape outcomes within the institutional mechanism observed</p>	<p>Downwards configurational causes</p> <p>Higher level organisational systems affecting the institutional mechanism observed</p>

To simplify the understanding of such causal mechanisms one can partition them into two: upwards causation, in which interaction of the parts affect the causal powers of the whole (superconstruction) and downwards causation, whereby emergent relations change as a result of “transformations within a “higher level” organizational entity or system of which the case is partially constitutive” (Vincent & Wapshott, 2014: 152). Furthermore, in the institution, company or workplace there are also distinct causal influences associated with norms and rules (normative powers and potentials) and organisational configurations (configurational powers and potentials). The former emerge from “enduring patterns of agents who constitute specific institutional mechanisms” (ibid). Conversely, the latter “are those that owe their existence to specific spatial distribution of people” (ibid) where “the members of the organization work together like parts of a machine to produce collective effect” (Elder-Vass 2010: 157 in Vincent & Wapshott, 2014: 152). I now provide a few examples to bring these concepts into relief. Muller’s 1999 study (cited in Vincent & Wapshott, 2014) provides an instance of downwards configurational

causes in German corporations where certain human resource practices occurred organically on account of statutory requirements and government legislation. However, when human resource department employees introduced other rules and routines, employees resisted as they went against cultural norms and other mechanisms working in the same system. With regards to downwards normative causes, I describe and analyse throughout this investigation how the agents and properties of a broader organizational system, namely Ofsted, interact at the actual level “to have an impact on the causal properties of the institutional mechanism studied” (Vincent and Wapshott, 2015: 163) - Zamzam Primary School. Turning to upwards normative causes, Vincent and Wapshott refer to Taylor and Bain’s 2003 study, which analysed how workers used humour and collective identity to carve out a space in which they could resist suffocating managerial practices. When trade unions utilised these internal normative routines to formally challenge management, they became an upwards normative cause for organisational change. Lastly, Barker’s 1993 study provides an example of upwards configurational causes when devolution of responsibility took place in an organisation. Workers internalised organisational goals, self-policing performance amongst colleagues in a series of “bottom up developments” (Vincent & Wapshott, 2014: 153) that changed the organisation at higher levels.

These four forms of causal mechanisms incorporating powers and potentials can operate independently or in tandem as will be demonstrated throughout my data analysis. In particular, they feature strongly in chapter 5 in which I use this model to understand the underlying systems and mechanisms shaping and changing the Muslim school, as well as it being a means to determine the institution’s place in society. What emerges from interviews with participants, as will be seen, is that the primary agent for ZPS’s evolution was Ofsted, thus making this thesis an exploratory study in which a goal:

is to discover the consequences, at a specific level, of a specific organizational development. These can either be known changes within the context (governance structures, legal regulations, strategic positions etc.) or constituents (internal structures, normative practices). The key point is that the researcher is or becomes aware of a change that has occurred or is occurring with the case study being undertaken to see what happens as a result of the change. (Vincent & Wapshott, 2014: 157)

I also make use of the four quadrant matrix in chapter 6 to gain a better understanding of teachers' experiences in Zamzam Primary, linking this back to their conceptualisations of the Muslim School in chapter 5. Vincent and Wapshott's four-quadrant matrix thus proved to be valuable theoretical tool in the analysis of data, providing an additional theoretical framework that fitted comfortably into the overall structure of critical realist ethnography and complementing it neatly. In the words of Vincent and Wapshott, "the theory seemed to talk to the data itself" (2014: 166).

Another theory I encountered that I would use to interpret data was one of institutional isomorphism. Institutional isomorphism has been defined as "conformity to institutional norms resulting in structural similarities across organisations" (Dacin, 1997: 47 in Breen, 2009: 1). This institutional resemblance can be further understood as being comprised of three mechanisms of isomorphic change: coercive, mimetic and normative (DiMaggio and Powell 1983: 150 in Breen, 2009: 22). Of greatest relevance to this study is coercive isomorphism which "results from both formal and informal pressures exerted on organisations by other organisations upon which they are dependent and by expectations in the society within which the organisations function" (DiMaggio and Powell 1983: 150 in Breen, 2009: 22). The incorporation of this concept into my work proved useful in answering my first research question, more specifically, identifying the ideologies and discourses that underpin Muslim faith schools and the tensions existing between government education policy and the conceptions of stakeholders in Muslim faith schools. For example, in chapter 5.6 I explore how Ofsted judgements can be understood as a form of coercive isomorphism that impact upon the policies, procedure and school culture at Zamzam Primary. The normative isomorphism alluded to by a number of teaching participants stems from professionalisation, part of which being "the filtering of personnel in relation to skill level requirements for particular occupations" (DiMaggio and Powell 1991: 71 in Breen, 2009: 25). Mimetic isomorphism, meanwhile, is born of circumstantial uncertainty resulting in organisations modelling themselves on successful organisations copying their "best practice" (Ibid, 24). Other informants would give credence to aspects of current pedagogical practice in a process of "normative isomorphism" (Breen, 2009) that re-shaped the character of ZPS, as will also become particularly evident in chapter five (The Muslim School) which explores the ideologies and discourses that underpin

Muslim schools (Research Question 1.1) alongside the conceptions of their stakeholders (RQ 1.2). As was the case with Vincent and Wapshott's matrix, institutional isomorphism would act as a complementary concept to the overall methodology of critical realism in excavating the underlying processes and structures in my study.

A final framework I would go on to employ in my data analysis was less associated with organisations than ethics: Haidt's "moral matrix" (2012), of particular pertinence to this study of a religious community invested in faith-based education. I use Haidt's typology to clarify definitions of conservative-liberal-libertarian ideologies. These are used to underpin and understand individual and collective beliefs and values at various points in this study whilst attempting to answer both my first and second research questions. In his work on morality, "The Righteous Mind," Haidt differentiates between conservatives, liberals and libertarians, the latter being:

The direct descendants of the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Enlightenment reformers who fought to free people and markets from the control of kings and clergy... liberalism split into two camps in the late nineteenth century. Some liberals began to see powerful corporations and wealthy industrialists as the chief threats to liberty.

(Haidt, 2012: 350).

"New liberals" (i.e. "left-wingers" or "progressives") hold government as the sole force capable of protecting the public from the dangers of capitalism whereas libertarians (or "classical liberals" or "right liberals") perceive government as the main threat to liberty, especially economic. In his work, Haidt develops a moral matrix to understand the differing values found in sociocentric nations and cultures - who predominate historically and geographically - and "W.E.I.R.D." individualistic societies (western, educated, industrialised, rich democracies). Whilst the liberal moral matrix is predicated upon three points: i. care/harm, ii. liberty/oppression; iii. fairness/cheating, the conservative moral matrix incorporates the aforementioned three anchors as well as: iv. loyalty/betrayal; v. authority/subversion; vi. sanctity/degradation. Libertarians also employ a six point moral matrix but prioritise individual liberty.¹⁴ For the purposes of this study, I have incorporated elements of

¹⁴ Haidt continues with the observation that those "with libertarian ideals have generally supported the Republican Party since the 1930s because libertarians and Republicans have a common enemy: the

Haidt's typology and, in particular, adapted his definition of liberty and libertarianism to understand how British Muslims of different social backgrounds, ethnicities and ages address issues of ethics in relation to private, faith-based education. I found this typology especially useful in exploring the ideologies and discourses that underpin Muslim schools (Research Question 1.1) alongside the conceptions of their stakeholders (RQ 1.2) as well as acquiring a better understanding of the reasons for teachers to work in ZPS (RQ 2.1) as well as parents choosing to send their children there (RQ 2.2). Of particular interest is the notion of religious liberty in a western secular nation and how this accommodates or prevents engagement with faith-based education on the part of my participants, an idea to be discussed in detail throughout my investigation.

Leaving behind theory and returning to the actual process of research, the main study itself took place in the autumn and spring terms of the 2015/16 academic year with twenty participants involved. Forthcoming chapters 4, 5, 6 and 7 are devoted to data analysis of interviews conducted both in the pilot and main study. Before sharing this analysis, I write some final words to cast further illumination upon my ethnographically informed research methods employed in the pilot study and amended slightly for the main project. One practice that has been a mainstay of ethnography is the taking of field notes as seen in the work of Peshkin's study of a Christian School (1982). Field notes are a valid and valuable means of capturing data and can act as an aid to the inevitable limitations of the human memory. Although taking field notes to gain an understanding of phenomena was something I did consider, I ultimately decided against this means of recording data. My rationale for this was both simple and multiple: firstly, I was already very well acquainted with my participants, daily procedures and the study site itself as an employee of Zamzam Primary School. This was not to suggest that I was or am an "all-knowing" observer by any means; it is certainly feasible that there may be elements of school life I was unaware of, had overlooked or could observe from an alternative angle. Note taking, therefore, could certainly be a means of documenting routines and rituals and rhythms of life in a Muslim school. Nevertheless, the pilot study had confirmed my desire to foreground participant experiences and opinions and the

liberal welfare society that they believe is destroying America's liberty (for libertarians) and moral fibre (for social conservatives)" (ibid: 353).

continued use, albeit slightly amended, of semi-structured interviews was, in my estimation, the best means of capturing the experiences, beliefs and opinions of participants regarding Islamic education – the main focus of this study. However, what I did do to support the collection of data via interview was to take a number of photos of the school environment as a visual corroboration of assertions and observations expressed by informants, some of which I have included in this thesis (on pages 93, 126 and 133). Taking time out of my roles as teacher and interviewer just to look at the study site in a physical sense provided an alternative means of capturing data for interpretation and a fresh view. In addition, I also reviewed the ZPS website and school documentation concerning policy and procedures alongside the senior leadership team's school improvement plan - available to me as a member of staff. This provided a more official voice concerning the daily practices that staff, including myself, would implement at times almost unconsciously so embedded had they become in our daily norms. Furthermore, I revisited Ofsted reports online so that my largely qualitative investigation was supported and substantiated to some degree by quantitative data. Again, I was all too aware of these Ofsted verdicts, having been compelled to enact them in my teaching. But this exercise proved useful in revisiting both the actual wording and attempting to unpick that to identify the underlying ideology and ambitions that informed daily teaching and learning. Nevertheless, the onus in this qualitative investigation was on participant voice as documented by interview and analysed in the next four chapters.

Chapter 4: Queensbridge and its Muslim Community

4.1 Introduction

This first chapter of data analysis partially addresses my first research question: what are the perceptions of teachers, parents and past pupils regarding the role and purpose of a Muslim faith school in the London borough of Queensbridge? To understand the above, it might be helpful to not only physically situate Zamzam Primary School in Queensbridge but to explore participants' perceptions of the locality and the community, or rather, communities therein. Whilst I did solicit the thoughts of all parents, pupils and practitioners concerning Queensbridge as a geographical area and their experiences of life in the borough, eleven participants (constituting almost one third of the total number of people interviewed) discussed the topic in greater detail. They are listed below:

Figure 3: Participants Discussing Queensbridge and its Muslim Community

Name	Gender	Ethnicity	Age	Role
Adil	Male	Mauritian/ White British	20s	Teacher
Connor	Male	White British	30s	Parent
Hamud	Male	Turkish	20s	Teacher & Parent
Maryam	Female	Pakistani	30s	Teacher
Nadeem	Male	Algerian	40s	Teacher
Rumaysah	Female	Somali	20s	Teacher
Sabrina	Female	Nigerian	30s	Teacher
Saluhideen	Male	Bengali	20s	Teacher
Sumayah	Female	Somali	20s	Teacher
Ubbah	Female	Somali	40s	Parent
Vanessa	Female	White British/Turkish	20s	Teacher & Parent

Having identified the informants contributing to this chapter of data analysis, I now provide a brief description of my route to Zamzam Primary and the school itself to provide the reader with an introductory illustration of my study site. I use a narrative format to bring to life more vividly the superdiverse south London borough of Queensbridge.

4.2 A Portrait of the Queensbridge Landscape

Embarking off the 07:34 from London Bridge, I walk through scenic Mandem Park amongst small groups of predominantly white but also Asian middle class professionals, indexed by their accents, attire and intended destination. From fragments of overheard conversations, I discern that these commuters are students and medical practitioners headed to Queensbridge Hospital, located close to Queensbridge Islamic Centre and Zamzam Primary School. Walking out of the park and hospital car park I enter Queensbridge High Street which continues to my left all the way to Queensbridge town centre and train station, a site of extensive rebuilding and regeneration over the past three years. To my right, Queensbridge High Street leads to the ward of Crenshaw, known for its market, theatre and the borough town hall. Immediately in front of me stand three imposing tower blocks, recently repainted in a muddy magenta and looming imposingly over Queensbridge Park. Crossing Queensbridge High Street, I walk into the grounds of a petrol station immediately adjacent to the mosque to withdraw some money from one of only two ATMs (the other is at Queensbridge hospital) within a ten-minute walk. It doesn't work. I enter the petrol station to buy a bottle of water and am served by a cashier whose appearance and accent suggest he comes from the Indian Subcontinent; using my debit card to make my purchase he jokes that the company have yet to upgrade their technology to contactless forms of payment. I exit the petrol station and looking left up Queensbridge High Street, past the mosque and towards Crenshaw, I see a parade of shops that in recent years have increasingly been occupied by Muslim-owned businesses. Beside a funeral parlour, a car repair shop, a Nigerian-owned newsagent and Caribbean restaurant serving halal food is a baby buggy shop whose owner - a British-Bengali member of the Queensbridge congregation married to a Black British convert – recently opened a fast food restaurant in close proximity. Situated a few doors down are an Algerian-owned supermarket replete with a halal butchers inside and a café/coffee shop next door also managed by men from QIC's

Algerian community. An Islamic bookshop and travel agents specialising in Hajj and Umrah pilgrimage visits are perhaps indicators that I am embedded in not just a Muslim community - but also a religiously observant one.

Walking up to the mosque front, I'm greeted by a long, horizontal billboard that extends over QIC's two entrances, one for women, and one for men. On a dark purple background emblazoned in English lettering are the words "Queensbridge Islamic Centre" and the "Shahada," the Islamic testimony of faith: "There is no god but Allah and Muhammad is his Messenger." Both entrances are currently closed, it being 8am and QIC not yet open to the public. However, if one were to visit the male prayer hall one would see a vast swathe of sky-blue carpet, on which worshippers pray, relax, chat and read the Qur'an. This prayer hall performs a double function: it is also where teachers and pupils from Zamzam Primary convene every day for their morning assembly as well as for performances, award ceremonies, visits from guests and special events. Similarly, were one to enter the ladies' entrance, a flight of stairs would take the visitor to a first floor landing, not as large as the men's prayer hall but twice extended in size since 2006. This is where female members of the Queensbridge congregation pray once Zamzam Primary closes at 3:15 pm. During the school day, however, ZPS teachers and pupils use this space for lessons, intervention groups and sports activities as well as to perform congregational prayers. It also operates as a "right of way" to the year 1 and 2 classrooms situated in the back of the QIC complex, so that teachers and pupils may access the rest of the building and playground. The remainder of the classrooms are small having not been purpose-built for teaching and learning – in its previous incarnation this part of the complex was a nightclub. These classrooms can accommodate between 15 (the smallest class) and 25 (the largest) children, although these numbers are not always filled to capacity. The green carpets that run throughout the school require staff, pupils and visitors to walk in socks, whilst the walls are covered in bright artwork and the everyday paraphernalia of the average primary school: assembly schedules, the names of school councillors and notices about forthcoming trips and events. Other than its warren-like maze of corridors and rooms spread over four floors, Zamzam Primary, looks and feels like any other school – at least at first glance. Upon closer inspection, one notices there are also display boards concerning prayer,

posters extolling religious virtues and writing in Arabic script. This is a Muslim school.

4.3 Plurality

Having presented a brief sketch of my study site typified by a “lived everyday multiculturalism” (Wessendorf, 2014: 9) and resembling aspects of Blommaert’s Oud-Berchem neighbourhood (2014a), I now turn to participants’ perceptions of the borough they live in, to provide a vivid backdrop to life in a private Muslim school in the London borough of Queensbridge. In my literature review, I described the concept of superdiversity as, “diversity upon diversity, diversity within diversity” after Blommaert (2014b), a phenomenon especially pronounced in a global city such as London (Hannerz, 2001; Sassen, 2005 and Block, 2006). Unsurprisingly, a number of participants in my study not only described but also celebrated the diversity of Queensbridge, starting with Sabrina, a convert to Islam of British Nigerian heritage and a teaching assistant in ZPS’s reception class and nursery. The extract below follows a discussion about the nature of teaching Muslim children in a faith school based in Queensbridge:

Sabrina: It’s predominantly Somali, predominantly. It’s a multicultural area, if you move a bit further down - not quite the same as Queensbridge so people recognise Queensbridge as being an actual community, which has people from all over, but they’re very strong.

Tom: Is that the Muslim community in Queensbridge?

S: The Muslim community.

T: Okay then.

S: And because of that, that’s what makes it unique.

(Interview with researcher, Zamzam Primary School, December 2015)

Sabrina was very much invested in the Zamzam Primary “mission” with an accompanying Islamic fellowship (for further examples, see chapter 6.31) and one can discern a valorisation of the ideal of a Muslim community in her response. Sabrina starts by homogenising the local demographic (“It’s predominantly Somali”) yet immediately thereafter depicts it as varied (“It’s a multicultural area”). Using a critical realist framework to gain a greater understanding, one might suggest Sabrina’s apparent contradictory remarks at the empirical level (our discussion –

recorded and reinterpreted here) might have been reflective of her individual experiences as she remembered and relayed them. Whilst Sabrina's account might not capture events in the actual domain (the open system "real" world) entirely accurately, one might ascribe a causal mechanism to the limitations of human memory or unconscious reproduction of a religious ideology that celebrated plurality. Alternatively, perhaps this was just an instance of Sabrina employing awkward phrasing when attempting to explain the landscape. Regardless, the fact that the Muslim community - a singular entity as opposed to the communities of Giliat Ray (2010) - was comprised of "people from all over" making it "strong" and "unique" for Sabrina.

Saluhideen, a British Bengali school governor and head of the QIC madrassa, would also see positivity in plurality, depicting this quality as the Queensbridge community's "unique selling point":

Tom: What are some of the unique characteristics of the community in Queensbridge that you work with?

Saluhideen: Erm, okay, one of the unique characteristics of Queensbridge, okay, is very mixed. You can't pinpoint, you know, I'd say this community centre belongs to this ethnic community because a lot of ethnic people are using the community centre so it's very mixed; people from all different backgrounds, all different ethnicities so that's very nice. It's very diverse. You feel that diversity. You feel that brotherhood of Islam.

(Interview with researcher, Zamzam Primary School, November 2015)

Throughout our interview capturing the empirical level of reality, Saluhideen would either knowingly or unknowingly, present himself as a de facto ambassador of Islam, frequently referring back to "official" positions (as he understood them) on different issues. For example, when asked to expand upon his expression "brotherhood of Islam," Saluhideen answered:

In Islam, Allah says- Allah says in the Qur'an, you know, "O' mankind We have created you from a single male and a female and We have made you into different nations so that you may get to know one another." And Allah says the best of you are those who are- who have piety and Allah is the one who knows and is all-aware and, you know, the message in this Ayah- in this verse of the Qur'an is that, you know, as humanity we are- we should- we're one family, you know, and here this is- that is the brotherhood of Islam. That's the teaching of the brotherhood of Islam that you see people from all different backgrounds but everyone is like a brother to each other. That's like Islam encourages brotherhood of all of mankind.

(Interview with researcher, Zamzam Primary School, November 2015)

Likewise, in describing the diversity of Queensbridge, Saluhideen laboured to make a religious point out of his own experiences (“You feel that brotherhood of Islam”) although colleagues would contest whether such events occurred at the actual level (see Chapter 6). Saluhideen’s repeated use of the verb “feel” positioned fraternity as a very real phenomenon experienced by himself and others, as opposed to it being a mere ideal. Accordingly, for Saluhideen, one group alone could not lay claim to Queensbridge Islamic Centre (“a lot of ethnic people are using the community centre”) resulting in a diversity that was a positive. The presence of such emotive language would be absent when Saluhideen and other male participants described their reasons for working in QIC (see chapter 6.21). In addition, Saluhideen and Sabrina did not originally hail from Queensbridge - Saluhideen still commuted to work from north London whereas Sabrina moved to the area following marriage. Perhaps their experiences at the actual level as outsiders to Queensbridge, its mosque and communities, may have contributed to their celebrating (in the empirical domain) the locality and its inhabitants, especially with regards to their observance of Islam.

The “hows” and “whys” in adhering to (and advocacy of) institutional authority and orthodoxy here and elsewhere, perhaps situate Saluhideen and Sabrina alongside colleagues Nadeem and (Qur’an teacher/imam) Samir as being “true believers” in the mission of teaching Islam and, by extension, in Islam itself. In his ethnography of a fundamentalist Christian school in the USA, Peshkin describes true believers as those teachers who:

Endeavour to make true believers of their students – that is, persons who perceive the Bible as absolute truth and who believe and mean to live by these truths absolutely. True believers do not conceive of competing, alternative truths. Truth is singular; it is to be possessed, not sought after.

(Peshkin, 1986: 55)

Whilst the two settings (a fundamentalist Christian high school in the USA and a Muslim primary school in London) are admittedly different, I do see an overlap in commitment to and lack of critical engagement with religion amongst certain participants in the two studies and thus deem the use of Peshkin’s descriptors

appropriate here. During my interviews with the aforementioned true believing participants, there were no open displays of disenchantment, dissent or departure from official doctrine, Islamic or institutional, unlike their “scorner” colleagues (Peshkin, 1986: 218) such as Maryam, Rumaysah and Sumayah (a matter to be discussed in depth later). Individual conviction and commitment to “the cause” of practising and preaching Islam appeared to me - an interviewer with my own subjectivities - as absolute, unquestioned and unwavering. However, outside of the empirical realm wherein accounts were constructed in conversation with a researcher who also happened to be a colleague, co-religionist and a convert (with its accompanying spiritual capital – a concept to be discussed in greater depth in chapter 6) such professional piety may have been less performed or pronounced and more “inconsistently orthodox” (Peshkin, 1986: 171). Moreover, such “belief in ultimates” might appear “absurd from outside the system in which the ultimates have meaning and value” (Erickson, 1984: 56). Despite my being a researcher striving for “disciplined subjectivity” (Ibid: 59), I was very much an insider to this system. Consequently, a number of ultimates would go unexplained during interviews (for example, Hamud’s references to the “Sunnah and the Qur’an” – see chapter 5.2), as I was both co-religionist and colleague who – participants seemed to assume - would be already acquainted with such ideas and understand them. Whether this would be a case for all co-religionists, especially converts, is less certain; perhaps I had proved myself by virtue of my commitment to teaching the children of the Queensbridge community.

Whilst Sabrina and Saluhideen described a positive plurality to Queensbridge and more specifically its mosque and extended site, other participants differed in their outlook. For example, Algerian-born Nadeem, a teaching assistant in year 5&6, described a less inclusive and receptive local community, albeit in the recent past:

We, er, Muslims used to have a, er, a kind of, er, people talking- telling them names and this. See you with a beard, you know, they tell you names. Alhamdulillah, the Muslim community has now came together.

(Interview with researcher, Zamzam Primary School, October 2015)

In the early days of the Queensbridge community, Muslims endured abuse on account of their visibly religious appearance, although Nadeem did not mention

whether incidents of this sort still occurred. Since then, this community, comprised of Muslims from numerous national, cultural, ethnic and linguistic backgrounds had come together and grown in strength. This could be seen to be a confirmation – at a local level at least - of Vertovec’s assertion that London’s Muslim population is probably the most heterogeneous in the world outside of Mecca (2007b). As a “true believer” in the mission of the mosque and school (as will become evident throughout these chapters of data analysis), perhaps Nadeem’s celebration of the merits of the Queensbridge Muslim community is to be anticipated.

British-Somali year 2 teacher Sumayah would also share her experiences of life in south London, hinting at a less welcoming environment. In this extract from a group interview with her close friend and fellow KS1 teacher Rumaysah - also of Somali heritage - Sumayah recollects a religiously motivated attack in Eltham, a deprived area that my participants said had a reputation for racism:

Sumayah: I had a lot of problems. There was actually at one point I was pebbled (laughs)!

T: Really?

S: Yes! Stoned! in Eltham.

T: You were stoned in Eltham? As in stones not...(Makes inhaling sound)?

S: In Eltham, of all places. Yes. With pebbles.

T: Who by?

Rumaysah: (Laughs.)

S: Basically, what happened: so I was doing my NQT at Goldsmiths and, erm, you know how the unis send you out to different schools to do your placements at?

T: Yeah.

S: They sent me, my last placement of my NQT, sorry, my PGCE year, they sent me to a school in Eltham. I went to the course organiser saying, look, I don’t feel comfortable going to Eltham. I don’t know I just had this perception of Eltham even though I live in south London.

T: Isn’t that where Stephen Lawrence was murdered?

S: EXACTLY!

R: I always lived in that area, it’s actually nice but you wore Niqab as well.

S: But you lived in Kidbrook side.

R: She wore niqab as well.

(Interview with researcher, Zamzam Primary School, July 2015)

Returning to the extract: even though Sumayyah lived in south London, she still felt trepidation at the prospect of working in Eltham. This was largely on account of the area's bad reputation due to the murder of Stephen Lawrence, a black teenager killed in a racially motivated attack in the early 1990s. In this discussion and indeed, throughout our interview, Rumaysah would interject and attempt to counter Sumayah's recollections ("I always lived in that area, it's actually nice"). She would also imply that Sumayah's overtly religious dress ("She wore niqab as well") might have contributed to her anxiety, alertness and the incident itself, although Sumayah quickly retorted that Rumaysah lived in a more affluent neighbourhood. Despite Sumayah's disturbing account of racist violence, most participants described Queensbridge, south London and indeed, the capital as a whole, as being diverse and thus conducive to the practise of Islam. One might also infer from this account, that less diverse – and one suspects, predominately white British areas (such as Eltham; see Eltham.gov.uk, 2011) – would be more prone to more racial bigotry. Accordingly, systematic racism could be understood to be an underlying structure that contributed to making life difficult for Muslims as experienced in the actual domain. There were, however, some exceptions as shall be seen in subsequent chapters.

4.4 Poverty

Following Rumaysah and Sumayah's depiction of south London as a place of contrasts, I now explore other participants' ruminations on class and capital at the empirical level. Perhaps unsurprisingly, participants' accounts of life in Queensbridge focused on its economic deprivation starting with British-Pakistani reception TA Maryam, who had just mentioned that she commuted to ZPS from another part of south London:

I don't know what the community is like round here but the little bit I have seen is rough, and it looks poor and it looks dirty!

(Interview with researcher, Zamzam Primary School, October 2015)

In this extract, Maryam admits her lack of knowledge concerning Queensbridge and its community – depicting the Queensbridge community as a monolithic entity as Sabrina had done (“I don’t know what the community is like round here”). She then presented the locality as impoverished, unhygienic and, in an earlier observation, an undesirable place to reside. In a brief reflection, Somali-born parent Ubbah would expand upon the sorts of criminal conduct that beset Queensbridge:

Outside school there is drugs, gangs, and kids go shops they took something. All bad- bad thing is going out around this school.

(Interview with researcher, Zamzam Primary School, October 2015)

Children studying at Zamzam Primary were confronted by illicit activities immediately outside of the school: drugs, gangs and theft. Perhaps this might explain why a number of participants would later describe a difficult transition from what they saw as the bubble or “guarded space” (Tripp, 2006: 31) of Zamzam Primary to mainstream society, amongst them Hamud and Maryam (see chapter 5.4: An Innocence Preserving “Bubble”).

Connor, a white British convert to Islam who lived in a block of council flats adjacent to the mosque complex sent his son and daughters to Zamzam Primary. He would also describe Queensbridge in unfavourable terms, suggesting that life circumstances and locality influenced the choices parents made when considering which school to send their child to:

The children, maybe in not such a run down area where I’m from, but even when I lived in Ilford when I came back here, there were some problems there. I was walking down the street and there’s clearly people with mental health issues, walking down the street screwing¹⁵ at everyone, a lot of anger round here and I see that in the children as well. Whereas when I was in Cambridge you look around and it’s very ideal, I know this, but people seem to be a lot more relaxed and I don’t think it would be a long shot that the kind of children who’d be going to school round there they wouldn’t be from- they wouldn’t have this- they wouldn’t be like the children that have grown up and are living round here that and are more rough. You know, I grew up in a similar area myself and I was one of those children that I’d be looking out for.

(Interview with researcher, Zamzam Primary School, June 2015)

¹⁵ A slang term used to describe aggressive facial expressions.

Connor paints a portrait of a harsh urban landscape as part of a meaning-making process in collaboration with myself, his experiences chronicled in the empirical domain representing events at the actual level of reality. He begins by alluding to his time in another deprived borough of London, Ilford, (LBI, 2010) to provide a frame of reference for similar experiences of poverty in Queensbridge. Connor is initially unspecific in his generalised critique of Queensbridge (“there were some problems there”) before outlining his issues in increasing detail. Public spaces were problematised with open displays of instability (“there’s clearly people with mental health issues”). This causal mechanism for an ever-present threat of aggression (“screwing at everyone”) manifesting at the actual level was an amorphous personal rage that permeated the local environment (“a lot of anger round here”) and was transmitted to the next generation (“I see that in the children as well”). What caused that anger in the first place was never explained. Connor then contrasted Queensbridge with Cambridge, depicting it as a calm city with a superior quality of life (“people seem to be a lot more relaxed”). He also compared the young people of Cambridge with Queensbridge (“they wouldn’t be like the children that have grown up and are living round here”), the latter unfavourably described as “more rough.” Connor’s addendum at the end of the account is perhaps intended to qualify his statements less they are misunderstood and perhaps deemed prejudicial. This is something he would do on a number of occasions throughout our interview (in particular, see chapter 7.23: An Ideological Critique of Mainstream Education). As a recently graduated MA student and postgraduate researcher starting his PhD, Connor was acquainted with academic protocol and interview procedures. I suspect Connor was more conscious of his “voice” and (academic) audience than other informants and thus adjusted his responses to my questions accordingly. Notwithstanding, Connor would articulate that he understood how young people behaved because he too “grew up in a similar area”, although had subsequently left a lifestyle he associated with that locality behind (“I was one of those children that I’d be looking out for”). Whilst Connor did not present an explanation for that transition, I would infer from our interview and my knowledge of him (based on my interactions with him working as a school teacher at ZPS) that embracing Islam catalysed that change. Moreover, in chapter 7.21 exploring the call to teaching, a number of male participants describe the transformative power of implementing Islamic teachings in

their lives and how it shaped their own individual destinies and choices in life; Connor's own account was typical of such narratives.

Like Connor, British-Turkish PE coordinator Hamud lived in Queensbridge close to Zamzam Primary. He would also describe the locality as deprived, drawing unfavourable comparisons with other areas:

Queensbridge is not – you know, it's a very working class area and you have a lot of people, you know, that are on drugs, rehabilitation, you know, you just step outside of the school and, you know, continuously look left and right and you're just – everything you try to do, and everything you've been taught to do is always being questioned, is always being attacked your ideology.

In this area – if you look at some of the other areas for example, you go more into central London; the people are very nice there, you know, it speaks for itself. You go more into central or west London the people are more nicer there, there's not that social constraints like here for example, everyone here in this area is mainly working class so they don't have the luxury of going – having a nice cup of tea or coffee.

(Interview with researcher, Zamzam Primary School, June 2015)

From the outset, Hamud establishes Queensbridge as not only a “very working class area” but also one with accompanying social problems (“you have a lot of people, you know, that are on drugs”). These issues were inescapable and confronted the Queensbridge community directly, especially pupils in Zamzam Primary (“you just step outside of the school and, you know, continuously look left and right...”) thus – in his estimation - challenging their beliefs and testing their manners and morals (“everything you've been taught to do is always being questioned”). Hamud then contrasted Queensbridge with other parts of the capital, albeit without providing specific references to names of streets, areas or boroughs. For Hamud, people were socialised by their surroundings. Environment itself could thus be understood as an underlying structure for events at the actual level: inhabitants in more pleasant parts of London conducted themselves with the appropriate decorum (“the people are more nicer there”) and enjoyed a superior quality of life, unlike the residents of Queensbridge who could not enjoy the privilege of dining out (“having a nice cup of tea or coffee”).

Adil, a trainee teacher at ZPS of White British-Mauritian heritage, would also depict the poverty of Queensbridge when reflecting upon how and where he would educate his own children:

Having taught in Queensbridge which the, er, really culture the school probably predominantly is Somali children; non-educated parents; definitely not- the vast majority of the children, if not all of them have English as an additional language, English wasn't spoken at home or competently. Now, whereas when I worked in Qadr school in Croydon it's- these are the children of pilots, doctors; very well-educated people and people that generally put a lot of emphasis- due to the cultural nature- cultural nature of- it's predominantly Pakistanis. Pakistanis are very family orientated etcetera; you know, work-driven people gen- from what I've seen anyway.

(Interview with researcher, Zamzam Primary School, October 2015)

Adil would begin by stating that the majority of the school body was from the Somali community, a point noted by other participants including Maryam and Sabrina and borne out by quantitative evidence such as the school register (which I had access to as an employee of Zamzam Primary). Adil then went on to suggest that the families of these children were “non-educated”, albeit without describing in greater detail what this entailed. Pupils from these families also spoke English as an additional language (also noted in the 2013 Ofsted report) thus compounding the situation further. Like Hamud before him, Adil contrasted Queensbridge with a different part of London, more specifically, Morden, where he had taught in a Muslim school comprised of a more middle class demographic (“these are the children of pilots, doctors; very well-educated people”). In his reflections, Adil appeared to reproduce, validate and align his outlook with existing mainstream class values and norms - perhaps because he too came from a middle class background with both parents working as medical professionals. Elsewhere, Adil narrated how for a period he did not observe a religious life and became involved in London gang culture, eventually becoming more observant of his faith, this coinciding with a desire to become an educator, a phenomenon to be discussed in chapter 6.21.

Hamud's wife Vanessa, the ZPS canteen manager and parent to two KS1 pupils, would focus on the general struggles of living in a global city like London:

Tom: What's it like raising kids in this part of London?

Vanessa: Raising kids... I don't think there's a problem raising kids anywhere, to be honest. It just depends on; you know- are you talking about, like, educationally or like-

T: Just the whole package of education and being a parent.

V: Obviously, living in London is expensive (laughs). You know, I think that's the only downside, really, it's just paying more money for rent, bills, erm, that's about it really, you know. Car insurance, stuff like that.

T: Sure, sure, sure.

V: I don't think that living here or living anywhere else in the country is... you know, how you want to raise your kids is how you want to raise your kids. It's not like I live in an area where there's a lot of crime and a lot of bad stuff going on but still I would be cautious anywhere, I wouldn't let them go out and play on their own. The one thing I like about living here even though obviously we pay more rent is that there's an Islamic community here. I've got loads of close sisters that I see on a regular basis; we're like a family and, you know, I want my kids to have that and if I live out of London they're not going to really have that as much.

(Interview with researcher, Zamzam Primary School, November 2015)

In the extract above, Vanessa exhibited a pragmatism concerning child rearing: there were challenges to be faced wherever one resided. Vanessa's impressions of south London differed from her colleagues: her home area was pleasant ("It's not like I live in an area where there's a lot of crime and a lot of bad stuff going on") but whether she meant her specific locality, the borough of Queensbridge or south London as a whole was not clear. However, site and circumstance did not apparently impact on Vanessa's method of raising her children; she would still exert vigilance wherever she lived, for example, supervising them constantly, especially outside. Conversely, Vanessa did express grievances concerning expenses, although her complaint about the general cost of living in the capital and its specifics ("rent, bills... car insurance") would probably resonate with most Londoners, irrespective of race or faith. The upside of living as a Muslim in London was the sense of community based on faith. Vanessa enjoyed the ensuing fellowship ("I've got loads of close sisters") characterised by frequent and meaningful interactions to the point that she described her community as an extended family. This was perhaps all the more pronounced in Vanessa's comments because of her own fraught experiences growing up (as will be seen in chapter 7.22: Individual Experiences of State Schools). The close camaraderie Vanessa experienced as a member of a faith community was an aspiration she harboured for her own daughters; however, this was a product of living in a multicultural global city like London and could not be

enjoyed in less diverse areas in the UK (“If I live out of London they’re not going to really have that as much”). This was again attributable to an impression (accurate or otherwise) of mono-cultural demographics and lifestyles that were not inclusive of minority religions, ethnic groups or both.

4.5 Conclusion

This chapter has sought to answer, in part, my first research question (“What are the perceptions of teachers, parents and past pupils regarding the role and purpose of a Muslim faith school in the London borough of Queensbridge?”) by providing a proper context to my study site via the impressions of participants who live and work there. Inevitably, my own outlook is informed by my own experiences as a researcher based in west London who had once lived in Queensbridge and was still working at Zamzam Primary. Unsurprisingly, my own view did not substantially differ from my participants in regards to perceptions of the London borough of Queensbridge. Linking the data back to the literature review, I am confident the reflections of my informants in the empirical domain provide an everyday exemplification of Vertovec’s “superdiversity” at the actual level. During interviews, my participants depicted Queensbridge as a superdiverse borough in a global city with an active Muslim community. The majority of my participants either lived in Queensbridge or neighbouring areas although a number commuted from other London boroughs so that they could work in Zamzam Primary and attend its mosque. Queensbridge possessed a “cornershop cosmopolitanism” (Wessendorf, 2010) typified by a “lived everyday multiculturalism” and “conviviality” (Wessendorf, 2014: 9) of the sort attributed to the Oud-Berchem neighbourhood by Blommaert (2014a). Informants saw the diversity of Queensbridge as a practical resource that facilitated the formation of a Muslim social network, enabling the observance of one’s religion unimpeded. Informants asserted that the comfort and confidence they enjoyed in openly expressing their Muslim faith in Queensbridge would be less feasible in mono-ethnic areas. Such claims were highly compelling but as a Muslim convert possessing white privilege, my “invisibility” meant I was unable to put them to the test based on my own experiences. Conversely, participants also depicted Queensbridge as afflicted with poverty, pollution and, in some areas, racism and violence. Referring back to the statistics presented in my introductory chapter 1.1 and drawing upon my own impressions of Queensbridge, I would

certainly agree with informants regarding issues with poverty and crime. However, as someone who spent passing moments in the area (commuting between the train station through Mandem Park to ZPS) I could not confirm or deny the saliency, frequency and magnitude of these antisocial experiences for local residents. I personally did not sense the impending wave of criminal behaviour that my participants described but then again, I did not spend prolonged periods of time in the borough or have pronounced interactions with its inhabitants. Throughout my discussions with informants there was a matter of fact pragmatism in presenting day-to-day life in the area, with underlying mechanisms and structures rarely discussed if at all. On the occasions these things were, the local environment itself was depicted as possessing certain negative qualities that residents imbibed and reproduced.

Having completed this introduction to Queensbridge, in the next chapter I present and comment upon the voices and views of participants concerning what makes Muslim schools “Islamic” and Zamzam Primary in particular.

Chapter 5: The Muslim School

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I attempt to answer research question 1.2 by exploring participants' perceptions of the Muslim school. In doing so, I demonstrate how my informants identified ethos and curriculum as the defining features of the Muslim school and what this entailed at the actual level in Zamzam Primary. Drawing on participant accounts, I also assess the similarities and differences between state and Muslim schools, with some informants suggesting that there was considerable overlap, especially in what was taught (largely attributed to Ofsted interventions) as well as the presence of elements of mainstream popular culture in ZPS. Conversely, some participants remarked that the Muslim school, and Zamzam Primary in particular, were closeted environments that shielded pupils, protecting an innate innocence from external elements deemed incompatible with their faith. Presently, I list the parents, pupils and teachers who shared their experiences and opinions on this subject.

Figure 4: Participants Discussing Conceptualisations of the Muslim School

Name	Gender	Ethnicity	Age	Role
Aaqib	Male	Bengali	30s	Parent
Abu Fatima	Male	Bengali	50s	Parent
Adil	Male	White British/ Mauritian	20s	Teacher
A'rfa	Female	Bengali	20s	TA
Ayan	Female	Somali	Teens	Pupil
Dasham	Male	Chinese	30s	Governor
Fatima	Female	Bengali	Teens	Pupil
Hamda	Female	Somali	30s	Parent
Hamud	Male	Turkish	20s	Teacher & Parent
Junaid	Male	White British/Jamaican	30s	Parent
Mahmoud	Male	Somali	30s	Administrator

				& Parent
Marwa	Female	French/Portuguese	40s	Parent
Maryam	Female	Pakistani	30s	Teacher
Nadeem	Male	Algerian	40s	TA
Rumaysah	Female	Somali	20s	Teacher
Sabrina	Female	Nigerian	30s	TA
Saffiyah	Female	Pakistani	Teens	Nursery TA
Sami	Male	Algerian	40s	Governor & Parent
Samir	Male	Bengali	30s	Teacher
Sarah	Female	Eritrean	20s	Teacher
Shams	Male	Somali	Teens	Pupil
Sumayah	Female	Somali	20s	Teacher
Umm Neimo	Female	Somali	30s	Parent
Vanessa	Female	White British/ Turkish	20s	Canteen Manager & Parent
Yasmeen	Female	White British/Algerian	Teens	Pupil
Zara	Female	Somali	30s	Teacher

5.2 The Ethos Underpinning Islamic Education

For many informants, the foundation on which a Muslim School was “built” was its ethos. “Ethos” can be understood and interpreted in many ways, but in the context of this qualitative study of a Muslim school, I define it as those religious values that underpin and inform the ambience and atmosphere of an Islamic institution with the aim of establishing an accommodating space in which to learn about and observe one’s faith. However, when theory and practice did not align accordingly in ZPS, a disconnect between the ideal and reality resulted in a superficial spirituality and failed fellowship that frustrated teaching participants especially, as shall be discussed in greater detail in chapter 6.43.

A number of informants - be they teachers, parents or pupils - stated that a Muslim school was characterised by the values that anchored its mission. In Zamzam Primary's case, this was articulated in the slogan "The Best of Both Worlds: Academic Excellence and Spiritual Growth," a strapline explored in more detail on the school website:

The aims of our school will be to deliver the full range of National Curriculum based subjects for the relevant stages within an environment that has a strong Islamic Ethos. Thus we hope to facilitate and encourage the building of a strong moral character, together with sound academic performance, amongst our pupils. By providing stimulating and differentiated work, setting tasks and goals that are achievable by all.

(Zamzam Primary School, 2016)

The juxtaposition of words such as "ethos" and "moral character" with "performance", "tasks and goals", perhaps reflects the way in which neoliberal performativity culture, and religious ideology and rhetoric were natural and negotiable in the ZPS environment, at the empirical level at least. Throughout this thesis, especially in this chapter, I attempt to determine whether this was an equally organic synthesis at the actual level and to what degree it manifested, as well as exploring what the causal mechanisms for it were. Nevertheless, the academic "excellence" combined with spiritual "growth" articulated in the school slogan would hopefully one day result in economic "growth" for Queensbridge families and community, as some participants would mention, Abu Fatima for example (see chapter 7.21).

I now examine in greater detail participants' views concerning the ethos that made a Muslim school such as Zamzam Primary "Islamic." I start with governor Dasham, a male convert to Islam of Chinese heritage:

I guess it's the ethos. Integrating religion into all aspects of education. And I guess in a state school, and also I guess in a wider society, religion is very separate; it's very secular; it's separate, it's not part of everyday life.

(Interview with researcher, Zamzam Primary School, June 2015)

Dasham pinpoints faith values as giving the Muslim school its uniquely Islamic identity, this ethos underpinning and informing every area of school life ("integrating religion into all aspects of education") in a manner that would not occur

in secular settings. Yet later on, Dasham (and other participants) described a partitioning of the secular and spiritual that took place in Zamzam Primary with regards to teaching and learning. Whilst an Islamic ethos might inform the school environment and ambience alongside individual attitudes and actions, it was not and could not be all pervasive. Even Qur'an teacher Samir, an individual very much invested in the Zamzam mission, would concede as much:

The thing is Muslim school is centred on its base on, er; the particular faith like so whatever, what's my experience is here is more or less rotating with that core faith. One thing you find absent here is what is contradictory with the faith is totally absent here. There might be something that's not totally promoting the faith but there's nothing that could contradict the faith but in a state school set up you find, there maybe some elements that could promote the faith a particular child follow. There might be something there and also something there, which contradicts the faith.

(Interview with researcher, Zamzam Primary School, October 2015)

Bangladesh-born Samir begins with a general observation ("Muslim school is centred on its base") before moving into a first person account: Muslim schools, and Zamzam Primary more specifically, were grounded in "core faith." In comparison, a state school might contain "some elements... which contradicts the faith," the faith presumably being Islam. The way Samir contrasted the Muslim school with state settings differed to Dasham. For his colleague – a one-time administrator in the NHS and more recently a manager of a supplementary school¹⁶ – the mainstream was a domain in which the spiritual and secular were separate. For Samir, deeply embedded in the Queensbridge community as the QIC imam and ZPS Qur'an teacher, that environment with its worldly trappings was potentially hazardous terrain for one's faith. No matter how strong in faith, the believer needed to be vigilant. However, when remarking, "There might be something that's not totally promoting the faith," Samir did seem to concede that Zamzam Primary was not a "total institution" in the vein of Gates School (Milner Jr., 2006) or even a "total world" like Bethany Baptist Academy (Peshkin, 1986). Such an outlook appeared more reminiscent of "pragmatic survivors" (Grace, 2002: 192) such as the stoic Abdur-Raheem (who shall be introduced in chapter 6) or "scorners" like Maryam

¹⁶ A supplementary school that was housed in a building in the mosque of a neighbouring south London borough and drew upon many of its community members as customers. By the time of writing this thesis, the supplementary school had moved and used classrooms in a secondary academy in another area of south London.

(who critiqued the disconnect between Islamic ideals and actual practice in ZPS) than fellow true believer Sabrina who would also adhere to the notion of ZPS being a “safe haven” (a topic discussed in more detail shortly).

Hamud would also share his ideas on the ethos of what he described as an “Islamic school”:

Where the core values are extracted from the main sources of Islam. So how a school is – basically, the mission statement of the school what are they trying to achieve and it needs to stem, mainly, from the two main sources of Islam: the Sunnah and the Qur’an. For me, this is what defines an Islamic school. If they don’t have a mission statement, which says that they will try to- they will try to make the students into a complete human being both religiously and academically, you know, I wouldn’t really regard it as an Islamic school if it’s not trying to work towards that.

(Interview with researcher, Zamzam Primary School, June 2015)

Hamud’s choice of “Islamic school” appears to be prompted by my line of questioning: “How do you define an Islamic school? What makes a school Islamic?” Moreover, Hamud’s use of the word “mission” echoes Merry’s choice of expression used to describe a philosophy of education (2010) and might be indicative of neoliberal jargon (“mission statement”) unconsciously imbibed and reproduced. Hamud identified two underlying mechanisms - the Qur’an and Sunnah - that not only underpinned but also encompassed the Muslim School, bestowing its “Islamicness.” Interestingly, Hamud did not elaborate what he meant by “the Sunnah and the Qur’an” and their involvement in the establishment of a Muslim school. This might be attributable to my being a co-religionist and thus an assumption was made about my understanding the use of such religious terminology and what these concepts entailed at the actual level of reality. Furthermore, Hamud’s use of “achieve” is perhaps indicative of the “market-speak” (Brown 2006: 694) that has become part of contemporary school life (Grace, 2002: 180 and Grace & O’Donoghue, 2004: iv).¹⁷ Whilst one might argue that this is not automatically an empirical demonstration of neoliberal forces acting as a causal mechanism shaping events, individuals and the institution of ZPS at the actual level, this sort of language would feature throughout Hamud’s interview. Notwithstanding, attending a Muslim

¹⁷ “Achieve” was one of the words Swain identified in his study of masculinities amongst primary school pupils as being indicative of an increasingly marketised approach to education (2001).

school was a process in which educators exerted agency, “to make a complete human” out of their students. The end product would be both “religiously and academically” sound, a reiteration of the Zamzam motto. A “true believing” student in Parker’s ethnography of an Islamic boarding school in Indonesia would also employ similar imagery:

This school has the objective of creating the raw material, or a young generation of Muslims who have mastered religious education, who can be used for spreading the word to the Muslim ummat (community)

(Parker, 2008: 7)

Hamud’s almost industrialised metaphor of a human factory (on the previous page) that refined and manufactured pupils into new and improved models exhibiting both spiritual and vocational excellence, is again suggestive of his absorbing, adopting and implementing aspects of the lexicon and perhaps ideology of the neoliberal approach to education. Althusser’s notes on ideology and ideological state apparatuses, whilst predating the neoliberal project, are of particular relevance at this juncture in terms of understanding how pupils in ZPS are readied for their place in society:

The school (but also other State institutions like the Church, or other apparatuses like the Army) teaches ‘know-how’, but in forms which ensure subjection to the ruling ideology or the mastery of its ‘practice’. All the agents of production, exploitation and repression, not to speak of the ‘professionals of ideology’ (Marx), must in one way or another be ‘steeped’ in this ideology in order to perform their tasks ‘conscientiously’ – the tasks of the exploited (the proletarians), of the exploiters (the capitalists), of the exploiters’ auxiliaries (the managers), or of the high priests of the ruling ideology (its ‘functionaries’), etc.

(Althusser, 2010: 384)

Zamzam students, like Hamud, required the “know-how” to traverse the world of work and “perform their tasks” albeit being both academically and religiously sound: a “virtuous capitalism” (Tripp, 2006: 31) or “prosperity theology” (Hunt, 2000). Whether this entailed “subjection to the ruling ideology” is debatable but there was little I witnessed or experienced to suggest neoliberal hegemony was questioned and challenged or alternatives explored in that setting. Whether there was even scope to teach a form of critical thinking in Zamzam Primary that enabled and empowered pupils to do so is also questionable. The school was accountable to an Ofsted regime which enforces a philosophy of and approach to education in accordance with a

neoliberal ethos and objectives, so producing a “skilled and ideologically compliant workforce” (Betzel, 2013: 236). Rather, what was imparted by teachers at ZPS was a synthesis of Islamic ideals and academic skills that appeared both natural and necessary for the preparation of the next generation of consumer-producer citizens for entry into higher education and ultimately, the workforce. Perhaps this was an embodiment of the “third way” noted in my literature review and advocated by some Muslim evangelists in which the spiritual and material could be, and were, reconciled (Brown, 2016).

Hamud would go on to expand upon his earlier comments, providing a brief inventory of some of the qualities that constituted a complete human:

In this Western democratic society, they don’t advocate these things it’s only religion that does because religion puts patience, respect and loyalty and, erm, good character at the top of its virtues, you know, good actions but in these sorts of societies you don’t get that.

(Interview with researcher, Zamzam Primary School, June 2015)

For Hamud, laudable qualities such as “patience, respect and loyalty” were the exclusive preserve of religion as opposed to a “Western democratic society.” One might question whether Hamud meant all religions or Islam specifically; one suspects the latter as he would later reference the Ottoman Empire as an exemplar of an idyllic age in which “good character” was cultivated.¹⁸ Conversely, in modern times pupils would leave school with academic qualifications (“you’ve got the skills to kind of calculate with arithmetic”) but lacking focus (“but a lot of people are clueless and they don’t really have much direction”). For Hamud, religion - and specifically Islam - was required to instil ethics, an assumption apparently being made that secularism was of questionable moral virtue, a by-product of Islamic ideology acting as a causal mechanism, shaping individual psychology and world view.

Parents also articulated similar positions in our interviews with the addition of “innocence discourses” in which this “natural essence” (Duschinsky, 2013: 774) would be guarded and preserved in the ethical Islamic institution. British-Pakistani

¹⁸ Medina Primary’s Qur’an teacher would describe the “fairly universal” values taught in the school as being “Manners, self-control, being tolerant.”

parent Aaqib would describe the Islamic ethos underpinning education in the Muslim school:

I suppose it's the ethos, the Islamic education, the Arabic language, the Qur'an, the Islamic ethos which they're taught which you obviously wouldn't get in a state school.

(Interview with researcher, Zamzam Primary School, July 2015)

Aaqib referred to an absent (Islamic) curriculum (and those faith values associated with it) in the state sector in a way that teaching participants would comment upon (in chapter 6.3). This might have been attributable to the fact that Aaqib was a parent and a teacher in a state school thus was well versed in current education practice. In describing the sort of school in which he would want his children to be educated, Connor also identified an Islamic ethos as essential:

The morals, the values which are dictated or found in Islamic texts, the Sunnah, erm, yeah, that's from the whole Islamic side.

(Interview with researcher, Zamzam Primary School, June 2015)

Just like Hamud, Connor would refer to the Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad as being of paramount importance. Alongside these prophetic traditions, "Islamic texts" would also determine the "morals" and "values" he wanted his children to internalise and act upon. Connor's choice of language intrigues: one wonders if he purposefully switched from "dictated" to "found." The former verb appears indicative of a top down imposition of morality from the divine to devotee – a downward cause as I see it - whereas the latter suggests agency on the part of the truth seeker. Examining the extract, I again suspect Connor employed this expression because he was cognisant his words would reach a wider (academic) audience, and one perhaps more secularly inclined and thus less conversant in an overtly "moral vocabulary" (Brooks, 2015).

Nevertheless, Connor would articulate how the aforementioned Islamic ethos would underpin and inform action in the Muslim school, specifically the performance of religious rituals:

I want to have a school that's Muslim they're going to practise their religion there so on and so forth - er, myself was that the children shouldn't be hindered from praying. Prayer is established, there's a non-issue about them eating halal food; erm, I'm not listing these in terms of importance here!

(Interview with researcher, Zamzam Primary School, June 2015)

In the extract above, Connor begins by expressing aspirations for his children to be educated in “a school that’s Muslim.” This could refer to the demographic that attends the school but examining his next remarks it seems more suggestive of a philosophy of education. Connor then identified prayer as an anchor in the life and daily routine of the observant Muslim, the implication being that this particular ritual is (or should be) a central feature of the Muslim school. Moreover, there is a possible allusion to the potential difficulties experienced in performing the prayer in other settings (“children shouldn’t be hindered from praying”) as would emerge in interviews with teaching staff such as Sabrina, Maryam and Saffiyah (see chapter 6.32). Connor also points out that in the Muslim school, halal food can be easily obtained, although he jokes (more evident from his tone of voice in the recording of our interview) about its importance, a reference perhaps to the close and seemingly odd, even inappropriate, juxtaposition of cuisine with prayer. Ultimately, it was an Islamic ethos that made a school Muslim for Connor and the reason why he enrolled his own children in Zamzam Primary.

Prayer would also feature prominently in my discussion with Bangladesh-born Abu Fatima. Prior to the extract below, Abu Fatima had just used the expression “Muslim school” which I would ask him to define; he responded thus:

For example, first of all, the Muslim should be given priority whatever their circumstances, their prayer or salah. If you go to a meeting Non-Muslim school, even while the prayer time is going on, somebody’s busy talking about their choice of subjects, choice of study and this and that. There is no reminder for prayer, even the Muslim parents. They get so much bogged down with the future plan of the children while the salah time is going on quietly. On the other hand, not many students are given the chance to do the prayers five times a day or whatever, you know.

(Interview with researcher, Zamzam Primary School, November 2015)

In his reflections, Abu Fatima foregrounds prayer in a way many teaching participants did when articulating the positives of working in Zamzam Primary (see chapter 6.32). This prioritising of prayer was unsurprising considering all my parent participants, outwardly at least, appeared to be “practising” Muslims who had made an emotional and financial commitment to educating their children Islamically. Abu Fatima also independently anticipated the experiences of those teaching participants

who had described the difficulties they encountered in attempting to observe the prayer in secular workspaces (again, see chapter 6.32). In Abu Fatima's account, neglecting prayer was attributable to both individual complacency ("even while the prayer time is going on, somebody's busy talking about their choice of subjects") and a preoccupation with worldly affairs ("they get so much bogged down with the future plan of the children while the salah time is going on quietly"). It was also positioned as a failure on the part of secular organisations to accommodate individual religious requirements ("not many students are given the chance to do the prayers five times a day"): a combination of upwards normative causes (daily routines) and downwards configurational causes, namely workplace policy (Vincent & Wapshott, 2014).

Abu Fatima would also note that "when you go to a Muslim school the students should behave like Muslims" an idea his 14-year old daughter, Fatima (a ZPS pupil 2010-2012), would also articulate:

Fatima: You could have an Islamic school with all the correct rules but if the students don't really strictly believe in it or if they, like, want out then it's not gonna have an Islamic atmosphere. Atmosphere is one of the major things in an Islamic school.

Tom: OK, what would you expect that atmosphere to be in an Islamic school.

F: Well, they want to learn about Islam they want to apply it; they want to spell it to people outside of the school, outside of the Muslim community.

(Interview with researcher, UCL Institute of Education, July 2015)

Fatima prioritised an Islamic atmosphere as a defining feature of the Muslim school, and something more substantial than the "trappings of faith" (Wilkinson, 2015: 176). For Fatima, agency was attributed to students ("they want to learn about Islam") in a way that differed from many of her peers, who depicted passivity in their study of Islam: learning was something done to them. This could have been a reflection of the realities of a hierarchical relationship experienced by pupils and teachers, not just in Muslim schools but in the British education system as a whole. For Fatima, pupils had to genuinely want to practise what was preached and taught and not just in that space but beyond: "outside of the Muslim community." Fatima's bold assertions might be explicable by her own single mindedness; with two older "practising"

siblings (Amar and A'rfa) employed by QIC and ZPS respectively, coupled with a calm confidence in her own Islam (as I discerned from our discussion and from my own experiences teaching her) perhaps she was ready to face the wider world in a way that peers less comfortable in their religious identity could.

Fatima would expand further upon what constituted the Muslim school and how it differed from a state school:

Most of the schools are based off Islam and the uniform is like, Muslim clothes. Erm, there's set times for prayer and Islamic subjects. There has to be a bridge of understanding between Islam and other faiths or people who don't believe in religion so because in Islamic- er, sorry, state schools, it's more focussing on the person themselves but Islamic schools teaches you to kind of, kind of interact with others who don't believe the same things as you.

(Interview with researcher, UCL Institute of Education, July 2015)

Fatima begins by describing faith as pivotal to Muslim schools without specifying in greater detail what this understanding of Islam was. Like Saluhideen and Hamud before her, Fatima seemingly presented an image of a monolithic Islam. However, elsewhere, she presented a more nuanced view: Muslims might “go to different masjids”, be “taught different things” and have a “difference of opinion.” Fatima then went on to discuss prayer and how integral it was to the school day alongside Islamic subjects, albeit without specifying what these exactly were. Fatima would also suggest that an isolationist stance was not a characteristic of the Muslim school as pupils were taught to “interact with others who don't believe the same things as you.” This assertion appeared to be grounded in personal experience, although whether this occurred at ZPS was not made explicitly clear. However, Fatima's sister A'rfa also supported the notion, noting how Zamzam pupils were “taught that they should be accepting towards other religions.” Similarly, former-pupil Yasmeen (2008-2014) would note that although ZPS was an Islamic school “it doesn't mean that teaching other religions is not included - our religion tells us to be open minded and respect all other religions.” Additional evidence such as the wall display pictured below would strengthen this assertion, although one might also argue that its prominent position in the main hall could be, in part, to placate visitors from differing backgrounds, especially Ofsted inspectors: a hyperbolised tolerance performed for an external audience.



Figure 5: “Places of Worship” Display in Zamzam Primary School

In describing the Muslim school, participants identified an Islamic ethos that infused its environment and manifested in action such as the performance of prayer (Connor, Abu Fatima and Fatima). ZPS pupil Shams (2010-2012) would also describe how in the “Islamic environment... everything always falls back to Islam. You won’t see anything coming from anywhere else,” echoing Samir’s sentiments expressed earlier. Shams would then provide a specific example of how the religiously unlawful could be blocked in the “Muslim school” (his choice of words):

Shams: The classes are always run on Muslim principles so despite more in a secular state school you can get away with things that in an Islamic school you wouldn’t be able to, because it all falls back to the Islamic way of life and the running of school, an Islamic school, you know.

Tom: Any particular thing you’ve identified that you wouldn’t be able to get away with here?

S: Erm, (pause) backbiting.¹⁹

¹⁹ The (Anglicised) Qur’anic term for slander.

T: That's exactly the sort of thing I was thinking of.

S: So, in primary school especially you're young and xxx²⁰ he would say look he's done this or that. In a state school the teacher would say to you, stop talking in class whereas in a Muslim school the teacher would say to you: stop backbiting, its haram and there's a punishment for it when you get a certain age; it's not good; don't do this, don't do that. Whereas in a state school you wouldn't receive that.

(Interview with researcher, Zamzam Primary School, July 2015)

Shams mirrored Hamud's earlier descriptions of the Muslim school as a place in which character was cultivated and differed noticeably from the conduct of children in state schools. Shams provided an example of these exemplary manners – the absence of slander and scandal mongering (“backbiting”) – and how gossip would be censured in a state school as mere disruption to a lesson: “the teacher would say to you, stop talking in class.” However, in the Muslim school, teachers would address backbiting as an ethical issue (“stop backbiting... it's not good”) that children would face the consequences of when they reached maturity (“there's a punishment for it when you get a certain age”). Whether Shams referred to divine retribution (in this life or the next) or the application of Islamic laws concerning slander in a real or idealised Muslim country was not clear. However, Zine outlines a similar set of circumstances when children transition from faith to state schools in Canada:

Students migrating out of Islamic schools, therefore, become more morally responsible for their behaviour where unIslamic practices like swearing... that are highly sanctioned in Islamic schools, become more common and less regulated by public school authorities.

(Zine, 2009: 60)

Likewise, for Shams, disruptive conduct in the Muslim school was “unIslamic” and although “highly sanctioned”, was less an issue of behaviour management but morality “because it all falls back to the Islamic way of life.” Faith values were an anchor for parents, pupils and teachers although one might ask if ZPS pupils had learnt to become “more morally responsible” upon migration out of their school and into environments where such conduct was “more common and less regulated” – an issue I address in chapters 5.4 and 5.5.

²⁰ (Inaudible.)

To conclude, analysis of the above interview extracts demonstrate how participants perceived Islamic values as bestowing a Muslim school with its unique character and attributes. Aside from Hamud's suggestion that these values were grounded in (the Islamic) religion and included "patience, respect and loyalty," few participants ever explicitly expressed what these values were – perhaps because they thought I would instinctively know of and implement them as a fellow religiously observant Muslim and employee of the school. Where participants were more explicit was in their articulation of the rituals or actions these values informed, for example the performance of prayer, the consumption of halal food and abstention from slander. Regardless, these values made an institution like Zamzam Primary and others of its ilk different to state settings, wherein the spiritual and secular were not only separated but the former mostly absent. This Islamic "essence" became tangible for my participants at the actual level of reality in the activities both adults and children engaged in, such as prayer and the Islamic curriculum that was taught, although even this would be a contested concept amongst participants as I now demonstrate.

5.3 The Curriculum: Absence and Enactment

Having heard from participants concerning the ethos of a Muslim school and how this manifested at the actual level of reality as, amongst other things, ritual, uniform and behaviour, I now examine what was taught and how. In Zamzam Primary, this was a combination of the national curriculum and a religious curriculum comprised of Islamic Studies, Qur'an and Arabic, as acknowledged on the school website:

The school has developed a broad and balanced curriculum. This includes aspects of the National Curriculum, which we believe to be most beneficial for our children, insha'Allah in preparing them for a worthy life.

Subjects are taught through the English language medium. In addition we offer Arabic Language, not only to fulfill the Modern Foreign Language requirement but essentially because it is the language of the Qur'an. The children are assisted in the learning of the recitation of the Qur'an in Arabic and the understanding of the meanings of Allah's divine revelation.

Teachers would reproduce such notions regarding what was taught alongside the national curriculum in their own individual reflections:

Nadeem: Yeah, mainly it's Islamic study, plus the Qur'an and Arabic
(Interview with researcher, Zamzam Primary School, October 2015)

A'rfa: They get the extra Islamic Studies, Qur'an.
(Skype Interview with researcher, researcher's home, February 2016)

Zara: Mainly the Qur'an and Islamic Study.
(Interview with researcher, Zamzam Primary School, October 2015)

Whilst Nadeem identified Islamic Studies, Qur'an and Arabic as being components of the Islamic curriculum at Zamzam Primary, A'rfa and Zara only mentioned the first two subjects. There are many possible reasons for this: one might be that in ZPS Arabic was taught as a modern foreign language and whilst the Qur'an is also written and recited in Arabic, it is of a "high variety" (see Wardhaugh, 2010) and afforded greater prominence and prestige as a sacred dialect.²¹ Another reason might be that Arabic was more salient in Nadeem's mind as a native speaker than his colleagues, who were not proficient in it; alternatively, the failure to mention Arabic on A'rfa and Zara's part may merely have been an oversight. Without speculating what the causal mechanisms were for A'rfa and Zara's omission of Arabic in their recollections – at the empirical level of reality - Sabrina did mention all three subjects as she mused over the differences between a state school and a Muslim school:

Sabrina: One thing I can see as opposed to a normal state school is that they take time to have core subjects that cover the Deen such as Qur'an, Arabic and Islamic Studies so nothing is neglected in that respect.

Tom: You used "core subjects" to describe Qur'an, Arabic and Islamic Studies. In terms of hours taught, could they be comparable to subjects such as Literacy, Numeracy and Science, which are also described as core subjects?

S: Erm, no, because it's not much time given to either but in terms of Qur'an, yes, they're learning at the same level or almost as much as Literacy and Numeracy but in terms of Islamic studies and Arabic, no, they're only being taught once- once a week.

T: Do you feel that's enough?

S: I mean, for the Arabic it's fine; for the Islamic Studies I think, um, I think for five year olds it's fine, maybe a little bit more when they grow older though. A bit more in Key Stage 2 because it's all about the Deen, personally, it's all about the Deen. As a Muslim, it's all about the Deen but how to just use Islam as a reference for everything you're teaching that doesn't have to weigh so heavily on one subject.
(Interview with researcher, UCL Institute of Education, December 2015)

²¹ Similarly Diglossic languages include: Standard German (High) with Swiss German (Low) in Switzerland; Standard French (H) with Haitian Creole (L) in Haiti and Katharevousa (H) and Dhimotiki (Demotic) (L) in Greece (Wardhaugh, 2010).

With further scaffolding, Sabrina clarified her initial comments, conceding that Arabic and Islamic Studies occupied less time in the school day. However, she maintained her position concerning Qur'an as being comparable to Literacy and Numeracy in terms of hours taught and thus meriting its classification as a "core subject." At this juncture, one might consider causality: why did Sabrina describe Qur'an, Arabic and Islamic Studies as "core subjects?" Perhaps a clue exists as documented at the empirical level: for Sabrina, a convert to Islam and very much a true believer (an assessment I make based on my interactions and interview with her), it was "all about the Deen." This Arabic expression can be understood to mean the religion of Islam as an all-encompassing way of life, permeating every sphere of human existence; for Sabrina, the sacred sciences were thus of greater import than the secular.

Ayan, a former ZPS pupil (2012-2015), would also address issues surrounding the Islamic curriculum and its importance in relation to secular subjects:

Tom: What sort of subjects did you study?

Ayan: Erm, we did like academic subjects then we had Arabic and Qur'an on top of it. Yeah.

T: What do you mean by "academic subjects?"

A: Maths, English, Science, Art and stuff.

T: And then you said Arabic and Qur'an as well?

A: (Nods.)

T: Why did you say those two subjects separate to the other subjects?

A: Because they're not stuff that are taught academically and they're- because it's a Muslim school and like, it relates to the religion; like, it's private.

(Interview with researcher, Zamzam Primary School, July 2016)

Whilst Sabrina had described the "core subjects" in the Muslim school as Qur'an, Arabic and Islamic Studies, for British-Somali teenager Ayan these seemed less "academic" by mainstream standards. Ayan could have been questioning the very validity of these topics or was perhaps employing educational jargon as best she could to differentiate the Islamic sciences from secular subjects. Examining the data

I suspect it was the latter: Ayan would go on to mention “normal lessons” - the “academic subjects” previously referred to – as well as learning about religion, which implies that even though Arabic and Qur’an were not “academic subjects”, they were still valid.

The provision of Islamic Studies, Qur’an and Arabic in Muslim schools (and as was the case in Breen’s Medina Primary, 2009) connects back to one of the reasons for their establishment: specialist training in religious sciences (Kucukan, 1998 and Meer, 2009 & 2011). In this manner, the Muslim school and Zamzam Primary in particular would counter mainstream practice and provide what Brown has termed “the null curriculum” (2009). Adapting Brown’s typology of the curriculum underpinned by critical realism, Wilkinson describes this concept as follows:

The absent null curriculum at the level of national policy comprises those topics that could have been included on the formal curriculum but are omitted by policy-makers and curriculum planners.

(Wilkinson, 2015: 152)

In recent times, religious education has not been realised to its full potential in the state sector with reports of “low standards, weak teaching, weak examination provision and confusion about the purpose of RE” (Burns, 2013). Islam, as an individual subject that could be taught to schoolchildren, is however (perhaps unsurprisingly in the UK) absent at the level of national policy, neither being selected by school management, nor enacted in the secular classroom. Management in Muslim schools thus react to (the unsurprising and even understandable) omission of Islam by secular “policy-makers and curriculum planners” as a foundation subject in the state sector by introducing it into the curriculum that teachers – in theory - then enact in the classroom. At Zamzam Primary specifically, a de facto separation of the curriculum into religious and secular subjects took place as decided by school leadership (The Head and Deputy). Before proceeding with the particulars of this separation, Wilkinson’s comments concerning “the lack of coherent penetration of faith values through the curriculum” amongst both Muslim and Christian faith schools are pertinent:

Faith schools, despite embracing the trappings of faith, such as modest uniforms, gender separation and the performance of prayer, often replicate the strict, often

unserious, compartmentalisation of knowledge into sacred and secular spheres in a way that mirrors the educational culture of non-faith educational settings.
(Wilkinson, 2015: 176)

As an employee of ZPS, I was certainly cognisant of this “compartmentalisation of knowledge into sacred and secular spheres” although would argue this mirroring of “the educational culture of non-faith educational settings” was more a product of on-going institutional isomorphism than an “unserious” approach to faith education. Accordingly, I interrogated participants further to ascertain how an Islamic quota complemented lessons or if there were opportunities to Islamicise (see Niehaus, 2011) the curriculum entirely by integrating seemingly disparate disciplines. Discussion with Samir yielded the concession that the Zamzam Primary curriculum was weighted towards “mainstream” subjects, which I interpreted to mean “non-religious.” He also posited that the exclusivity and individuality of certain sacred subjects in how they were taught – especially Qur’an - precluded their introduction into secular lessons:

Tom: What is the balance between the Islamic content of the curriculum and secular mainstream content?

Samir: I don’t think they’re equal. There are few subjects where there’s not much change like Maths or Science or Literacy, that’s what I see, though I don’t teach them, day to day interaction with children there’s most – I feel there’s not something that you have to penetrate the religious things-

T: Yeah.

S: Maths is 5 plus 5 equals 10 there’s nothing to do with the religion in Maths.
(Interview with researcher, Zamzam Primary School, October 2015)

As Zamzam Primary’s Qur’an teacher responsible for teaching the Islamic holy book, Samir spent less time with individual pupils than their class teachers. Consequently, Samir’s viewpoint – that core subjects presented fewer if any opportunities to incorporate explicitly religious teachings – appeared to have been shaped by his limited interactions with pupils and the relatively linear nature of teaching Qur’an by rote memorisation. Whether he was satisfied with the prevailing separation and weighting of the secular over the spiritual is open to interpretation: his “I don’t think they’re equal” could suggest a preference for a recalibration of the two.

A'rfa, however, would differ with her colleague concerning openings to introduce the spiritual into the secular:

A'rfa: Well, you can include it in every single subject I think; a bit here and there and then obviously they do have their separate subjects in which they can go into more detail.

T: Did you find that in your experience?

A: Yeah.

(Skype Interview with researcher, researcher's home, February 2016)

Perhaps A'rfa's role as a TA who supported class teachers (including two years with myself, an individual with an arts and media background before education and academia) in the delivery of secular subjects, meant she could not only envisage but had actually experienced opportunities to introduce, incorporate and embed explicitly spiritual themes into non-religious lessons – an “easy union between Islamic ethos and national curriculum” (Breen, 2009: 129). A'rfa's brother, Amar, also saw scope for a synthesis of the spiritual and secular; however, he suggested that this amalgam could actually be catalysed by pupils:

I remember something like more creative subjects, er, when it came to, like, using the vocabulary to construct sentences, making stories or so on, where kids were allowed that flair, they would- I think more often than not they were the ones who would come up with maybe like stories of the Sahaba, or using words like Halal and Haram and Salah, just these- because it's, obviously, part of their culture and the way they see things so, obviously, they'd be using those words and thoughts as well.
(Interview with researcher, Zamzam Primary School, July 2015)

In this extract, Amar paints a portrait of a spiritually and culturally “safe space” (Blackledge and Creese, 2010: 6) devoid of racism in which pupils in a Muslim school could express themselves in a manner that was “culturally congruent” (Au & Kawakami, 1994).²² They were not required to adapt, alter or deny their identity and heritage in a way that might occur in mainstream settings (a topic addressed in

²² School learning occurs in a social context” (Au & Kawakami, 1994) and since literacies are unequally distributed on gender, class, ethnicity, geographical location, disability and combinations of the above (Mills, 2011), children from diverse backgrounds can underachieve in mainstream settings due to the “mismatch between the culture of the school and the culture of the home” (Au, 1993: 8). This disconnect has been described as “cultural conflict”, “cultural dissonance”, “cultural misalignment” (Tyler et al, 2008a), “cultural mismatch” (Villegas, 1998) and, in the context of reading and writing, “literacy shock” (Li, G. 2001: 58).

chapter 6.3 concerning “The Advantages of Teaching in Zamzam Primary” and later throughout chapter 7 involving parent and pupils’ experiences and opinions). This “freedom of speech” manifested specifically in explicitly religious language (“halal”, “haram”, salah”) and references to righteous role models (“stories of the Sahaba” - the companions of The Prophet Muhammad). These religious icons could be categorised as “Mythical Ancestors in Hero Tales of the Creation Myth Cycle” when examining the role of belief systems in the organisation:

The school can be seen as having a world view or ideology perpetuated by the inculcation of religious belief (through myth and ritual) and grounded in a folk philosophy whose elements are: terms of definition, principles of valuation, rules of logic, methods of explanation for cause, and forms of predictive statements.

(Erickson, 1984: 54)

For Erickson, the likes of George Washington, Thomas Jefferson and Abraham Lincoln fulfilled the role of heroic ancestors in the creation myth of American nationhood. Adapting Erickson’s outlook, I argue that similar claims can be put forth concerning traditions surrounding the Prophet Muhammad and his companions (Amar’s “stories of the Sahaba”) as performing the same function when imparting the origins of Islam in a Muslim school. In addition, “inculcation of religious belief” was certainly an objective of ZPS as made manifest in their mission statement (on the school website) and enacted at the actual level, in rituals such as daily prayer, ablutions and supplication.

With Islam so infused in the environment and ambience of Zamzam Primary School (although some participants would question to what degree, as shall be seen in chapter 6.43: Failed Fellowship, Superficial Spirituality), some form of religiosity would inevitably appear in pupils’ words and actions. A’rfa and Amar’s mutually positive outlook regarding the coalescence of religious and secular subjects might be attributable to another factor: personality. Both siblings were young, British-born Bangladeshi Muslims and university-educated professionals. Moreover, A’rfa and Amar were especially imaginative and individualistic in their interpretation and expression of religious orthopraxy, most visibly in their take on traditional Islamic attire. A’rfa, on occasion, sported a Niqab with a home-made Supergirl hooded top with her name stitched on the back; her brother’s distinct Gothic black outfits were described by a colleague as being “Victorian Bengali.” Perhaps the artistic

inclinations of A'rfa and Amar enabled them to envision windows of opportunity to incorporate Islamic teachings into subjects in a way that other colleagues such as Samir could not.

Ayan would independently align herself with A'rfa and Amar on the issue of curriculum, seeing numerous opportunities to incorporate Islam into teaching and learning:

Tom: You used the term "Muslim school." Could you explain in a bit more detail what that means.

Ayan: Er, that we have normal lessons but we like also learn about the religion. We learn about the religion of Islam and we put it into everyday aspects and stuff so you put the like, er, religion into normal academic stuff and, erm, other stuff as well.

T: How is the religion put into "normal academic stuff?"

A: So erm, for example, you do maths and then you learn about erm, like Muslim scholars and scientists and inventors xxx and stuff, for example, the person who invented algebra and things like that which you don't really focus on in state schools.

(Interview with researcher, Zamzam Primary School, July 2016)

Examining the above extract one might enquire if Ayan's ability to envisage an Islamicised curriculum had been shaped by experience. Her comments in the empirical level would suggest so: one might study numeracy then this might lead to discussions about the Muslim mathematician who "invented algebra" – Erickson's "mythical ancestors in hero tales" (1984: 54). This was also indicative of an ethnocentric curricula preserving and imparting knowledge of Islamic civilisation, creed and culture past and present (Haw, 1994 in Kucukcan, 1998; Mustafa, 1999; Fuess, 2007; Merry, 2010 and Meer, 2011). Ayan had joined ZPS in Year 3, studying for three and a half years, taught by two of the schools most experienced and inventive teachers - one being the Deputy Head, the other myself - a set of circumstances that might also have contributed to her open-minded outlook. Notwithstanding, for Ayan, Zamzam Primary imparted a culturally relevant curriculum that combined and synthesised the best aspects of both the secular and religious systems.

Parent and canteen manager Vanessa would also perceive a neat integration between religious ritual and secular teaching in Muslim schools, and Zamzam Primary in particular, that benefitted pupils:

When they come in, they're taught, like, Islamic manners; they're taught, like, duas for certain things and literally throughout their whole day in school - even though they're learning English, Maths and Science - there's the whole, you know, Islam aspect of it as well as it being in a mosque. You know, they go and pray at Salah time and they have Qur'an lessons with their teachers and literally, everything – even when they're doing Geography always compare- it's like, always, erm, interlinked with Islam as well as when they're doing their English stuff or Maths or whatever.

(Interview with researcher, Zamzam Primary School, November 2015)

The extract starts with Vanessa describing the routine of teaching and learning, employing a pronoun (“they”) to refer to pupils. In doing so, she attributes agency to teaching staff (“When they come in, they're taught”): the child can be seen as a *tabula rasa*, a blank slate that the teacher imprints with Islam (“they're taught, like, Islamic manners; they're taught, like, duas”); a downwards cause for their learning. The spiritual cultivation of children is a constant (“literally throughout their whole day in school”) that is not impinged upon by the teaching of secular knowledge (“even though they're learning English, Maths and Science”). Moreover, in Zamzam Primary's case, the formation of good character amongst pupils is augmented by the school's close proximity to QIC, enabling the performance of ritual (“they go and pray at Salah time”) in accordance with institutional scheduling. Vanessa also suggests that there is an overlap in the curriculum between the secular and spiritual. In this way, she agreed with the likes of A'rfa and Amar who saw myriad opportunities to integrate Islam into outwardly secular subjects – a potentially Islamicised curriculum. One could postulate that Vanessa's openness to synthesising the spiritual and secular was grounded in the imaginative and artistic disposition that she shared with A'rfa and Amar; Vanessa worked as an art instructor at Zamzam Primary's after school club. Regardless, for Vanessa, her children could enjoy “the best of both worlds: “academic excellence, spiritual growth.”

The last words on the subject of curriculum come from governors Dasham and Sami, albeit from a position of not having worked in the classroom environment. In this

extract, Dasham muses over the differences between Muslim schools and state schools, leading to the hows of the practical implementation of knowledge:

Dasham: What I like about a Muslim school, it encompasses all aspects.

Tom: That's interesting. Did you ever get a chance to visit any of the lessons in the school?

D: Yeah.

T: And did you any chance to see that religiosity permeating the lessons outside of Islamic Studies, say in Literacy, PE, science, Art... were there any specific instances you can recall of the immersion or flooding of religion in the whole curriculum?

D: I think... erm, from what I can remember, er – it's not necessarily- what's the word? OK, it's not completely embedded, so, for example, if you're doing Maths you wouldn't go onto, I don't know, er, you wouldn't go onto... how do I put this? You wouldn't go talk about, er, the Qur'an necessarily.

T: Yeah.

D: 'Cause it's not necessarily there's a link – there's always a link – but you wouldn't necessarily just purposefully, intentionally do that-

(Interview with researcher, UCL Institute of Education, June 2015)

In this extract, Dasham echoes elements of his colleagues' opinions, albeit with a caveat. Theoretically, one could embed religious maxims and morals in secular lessons, but that was predicated upon the character of a particular subject; for instance, Numeracy could not transition neatly into Qur'an, a view shared by Samir (although counteracted earlier by Ayan and by participants in Breen's 2009 study). Moreover, whilst there was "always a link" between the spiritual and secular (the actual level) it might not always be apparent (the empirical domain) or pragmatic to fuse the two: "you wouldn't necessarily just purposefully, intentionally do that."

In a separate conversation, fellow-governor Sami and his wife Marwa, suggested that this fusion was not only possible but had been a mainstay of Zamzam Primary in an idyllic past:

Sami: Before, Islam was everywhere.

Marwa: Yeah.

S: Teaching literacy: you have Islam.

M: Everything was linked to Islam.

S: You have Islam.

M: Every single thing.

(Interview with researcher, family home, October 2015)

Algerian-born Sami and his convert-wife Marwa would reminisce on the halcyon days of the “old” Zamzam Primary in which “Islam was everywhere.” This would be a recurrent theme in their interview and also in discussions with Rumaysah who, at that point, was the longest serving member of staff. In this way, these participants shared some of the characteristics of those devotees of subcultures who glorify a golden age prior to its sound and style being infiltrated or adopted by an opportunistic and monolithic mainstream, thus becoming irrevocably tainted (Hebdige, 1979). Whether this had actually been the case with Zamzam Primary is open to debate: Sami and Marwa had recently curtailed all involvement with the school after ten years as parent governor and PTA member respectively. Their weariness with ZPS and its umbrella organisation, Queensbridge Islamic Centre, was especially evident in our interview. One could speculate that Sami and Marwa’s jadedness was a psychological and emotional causal mechanism that had subsequently shaped their recollection of events documented in the empirical domain – their meaning-making venture with myself.

In this section I have shared the views of pupils, parents and teachers concerning curriculum as a defining feature of the Muslim school. An Islamic curriculum was underpinned by an Islamic ethos and contained subjects normally absent in a secular syllabus: Islamic Studies, Qur’an and to a lesser extent, Arabic. These subjects were taught in Zamzam Primary alongside the British national curriculum, although participants differed on the nature of their delivery in the classroom. A number of my informants not only felt there was a weighting towards secular subjects but that religious and secular studies were largely distinct entities (as was the case in Kucukcan’s Muslim school in North London; 1998) that could not be integrated. A few members of the teaching staff saw opportunities to incorporate elements of religious teachings into mainstream lessons, whilst governor Sami argued that in a halcyon past when ZPS was more religious (a subject addressed in chapter 6.43) the entire curriculum had been Islamicised. I now turn to participant perceptions of the

Muslim school as an innocence preserving bubble that safeguarded its pupils' spirituality.

5.4 An Innocence Preserving “Bubble”

Having heard from participants how the ethos and curriculum made the Muslim school “Islamic”, I now explore a by-product of that unique environment: the notion of it being a “bubble”, shielding its occupants from a hostile external world and thus preserving their immanent innocence. Tripp’s remarks below concerning the concept of a moral economy are of relevance to how Zamzam Primary was perceived by parents as an Islamic sanctuary (a perception to be challenged by teachers shortly):

For those who insist on the impossibility of synthesis between Islamic and non-Islamic values. It has led to attempts to create a ‘guarded sphere’ as an imaginative and social construct within which an ideal of Islamic life can be led under the oversight of those who can unfailingly distinguish right from wrong, the Islamic from the un-Islamic.

(Tripp, 2006: 9-10)

As will be seen in chapter 7, many parents investing in their children’s education at ZPS did so because they saw an “impossibility of synthesis between Islamic and non-Islamic values” and believed in the “guarded sphere” of the Muslim school as less of an “imaginative and social construct” but a tangible reality at Zamzam Primary.

Environment would feature in Mahmoud’s reflections on the character of the Muslim school. In particular, he (as both parent and ZPS’s administrator with a daughter studying in Reception year) would describe the Islamic values that underpinned and infused the environment of the institution. Ethics informed action and ultimately the accomplishment of institutional objectives: shaping students to preserve their innocence. Beginning with his observations of the micro-climate of Zamzam Primary, Mahmoud would provide a bird’s eye view of the moral economy that made a school Islamic:

Preserving their innocence, I think that’s what Islamic Schools really do: preserve the children’s- preserve the child’s innocence to an extent where they even go to a public school they really are innocent as well. And their adherence to instructions: like If a teacher tells them to sit down; they’re not bad in terms of they scream, they shout or get on top of the tables or whatever but they don’t challenge the teacher’s

authority cause the parents say the teacher is like your parent in that sense. So again, understanding authority that gives you a better idea as well.

For Mahmoud (of Somali heritage and born in Saudi Arabia) the role of the Islamic school was to preserve innocence, a quality that - in his estimation at least – was innate in every child. In addition, “Islamic schools” were so effective in this endeavour, that the innocence of pupils was safeguarded even when they transitioned into mainstream education. In his discussion on popularist conceptualisations of innocence, Duschinsky employs the concept of boundaries that I will use hereon as I attempt to understand parental motivations for sending their children to what they perceived to be the safe space of Zamzam Primary:

These symbolic boundaries designate as impure those phenomena that would undermine the fidelity of the child to an imputed essence, through the intrusion of elements heterogeneous, foreign or inferior to this essence.

(Duschinsky, 2013: 774)

For Mahmoud and other parents these boundaries were less symbolic, more real in the Muslim school, albeit with varying degrees of permeability (as will be discussed shortly) and thus “the fidelity of the child” was not “undermined.” Mahmoud would provide proof of the “essence’s” resistance to “inferior elements” (for example, secularism and associated sins in the sight of a religiously observant, socially conservative British Muslim) found in wider society but inoculated against in the Muslim school: children were more deferential to elders (“they don’t challenge the teacher’s authority”). This was not solely a result of the efficacy of the Muslim school but also attributable to socialisation at home (“the parents say the teacher is like your parent in that sense”). In his account, Mahmoud also contrasted the exemplary conduct of children who exhibited appropriate deference to seniority against examples of improper behaviour (“they scream, they shout or get on top of the tables”). This foregrounding of authority appears indicative of a value present in the conservative’s 6-point moral matrix, but of less importance to the archetypal liberal possessing a 3-point moral matrix (Haidt, 2012). Civil conduct manifested not just in action but speech: the content of children’s conversations being aptly innocent (“they don’t have to be talking about certain things that adults talk about”), a topic addressed in detail by Vanessa later in chapter 7.2 (Parental Engagement with Islamic Education).

Umm Neimo - a Somali mother with a daughter in year 5 - would reiterate Mahmoud's remarks about the preservation of immanent childhood innocence in the Muslim school. Having just described the archetypal "Islamic school" (her words), Umm Neimo then addressed those malign ideas, influences and actions that this institution should guard against:

Tom: Can one completely block out the influence of the outside world in an Islamic School?

Umm Neimo: Erm, in terms of blocking it, erm, let me put it into a different way. Basically, If the child is being told the same things at home and at school, the chances of that child learning those things that are being prevented from them is very small and even if they do hear it and they're getting told from school and at home "This is not good for you," it's, er, cooperation between the school and the home environment, whereas if the child has been told at home and the school's not doing the same thing the child will be lost. There'll be a lot of confusion in the child's mind: why am I getting this only told at home and then there's a different story at school. Who am I supposed to trust? Who is telling the truth? Who is right and who is wrong? Is it parents or teachers? So, er, blocking it is- I wouldn't say blocking it but the child will be more knowledgeable and because they're being supported by both sides the chances of them learning those things that they've been protected from is very small.

(Interview with researcher, Zamzam Primary School, December 2015)

Looking closely at Umm Neimo's choice of words, it seems that she invested in the (contemporary) concept of the parent-teacher partnership ("it's, er, cooperation between the school and the home environment") in a way that some Muslim parents did not – a phenomenon in ZPS that emerged in discussions with Mahmoud as well as being noted in external settings by other commentators (Merry, 2010; Driessen & Valkenberg, 2000 and Ahmed, 2013). This partnership was also perhaps evidenced in her use of the verb "support" although "sides" does suggest some form of separation. Umm Neimo saw the efficacy of the school-parent partnership predicated upon good communication with otherwise deleterious outcomes for the pupil ("if the child has been told at home and the school's not doing the same thing the child will be lost") although this appeared to relate more to ethics and identity than academic achievement. Umm Neimo also echoed Mahmoud's earlier assertion concerning home socialisation informing behaviour in school ("If the child is being told the same things at home and at school").

Moving on, Umm Neimo's use of the passive verb "told" when referring to children was another interesting and recurring feature of our discussion: for example: "they're getting told"; "if the child has been told"; "why am I getting this only told at home?" This could denote adult agency as a downward cause - albeit external to the institution or organisation - in imparting the religion to children in a hierarchical yet to some degree, empathetic relationship. This dynamic was depicted as not only a learning experience but also a moral one from the perspective of the inquisitive child ("Who is right and who is wrong? Is it parents or teachers?"). Umm Neimo then concludes with another reference to the success of the Muslim school in shielding students from illicit ideas and actions ("the chances of them learning those things that they've been protected from is very small"): the "haram" could be blocked, but not completely.

A number of participants posited that children leaving Zamzam Primary would experience a difficult transition, not just moving from the "guarded space" (Tripp, 2006: 31) of a faith school to a state school, but entering wider society as a whole. Returning to the concept of curriculum, Samir suggested that ZPS students were unfamiliar with facets of mainstream culture, because certain subjects were not taught in school. Managerial decisions regarding policy and planning can thus be understood as a downwards configurational cause (Vincent & Wapshott, 2014) for such circumstances:

I feel like the children, those who are solely studying here, they are sort of completely blind about the other side which the mainstream society might have those sort of things like art, dance, music those sort of things.

(Interview with researcher, Zamzam Primary School, October 2015)

Samir's choice of words fascinates. Zamzam Primary's Qur'an teacher described "those sort of things" acceptable to wider society but taboo in ZPS as, and perhaps not restricted to, "art, dance, music" - something Niehaus identifies as common to a number of conservatively inclined Muslim schools (2011; also see: Driessen & Valkenberg, 2000; Merry, 2005; Coles, 2008; Niyoz & Memon, 2011 and Suleiman, 2012). Whilst it might not be entirely clear from reading this extract that Samir felt these forms of creative expression were prohibited in Islam, he would clarify his

position elsewhere in our interview.²³ However, this prohibition was articulated here in the general sense – did that mean some forms of art, dance and music were acceptable? I suspect Samir failed to provide further explanation because I would presumably know of the prohibition as a co-religionist working in the same religiously conservative environment. Adil would provide “corroborating evidence” that these art forms were deemed outlawed pursuits by more orthodox-inclined Muslims when describing his own pragmatic teaching practice:

For me to tell these children about certain, you know, maybe issues more conservative Muslims would find as forbidden such as music or television, that’s an issue a million times down the line. It doesn’t cross my mind. They don’t need to know this, yeah? What’s more important, right?

(Interview with researcher, Zamzam Primary School, October 2015)

Year 4 teacher Sarah would also allude to the taboo of television and music in detailing parental struggles raising British Muslim teenagers grounded in their faith:

Also bringing in the TV and the music and the pressures and the influences, which they’re very aware of. They’re like: oh my gosh, we’ve got so much to work with; we have so much- like at home, you know, when the music comes on.

(Interview with researcher, Zamzam Primary School, July 2015)

Similarly, music would prove taboo in Martinez’s study of Florida Islamic School, although the “tough stance” of school administrators and teachers was not necessarily adhered to by students (2012: 98). Intriguingly, in Zamzam Primary’s 2013 Ofsted report there was criticism of the school’s allegedly narrow curriculum that failed to prepare pupils for wider life in British society.²⁴

The school does well to balance the requirements of the secular and Islamic curriculum but this does lead to a shortage of time to teach in depth subjects such as history and geography. This has an adverse effect on pupils’ achievement and also the opportunity to extend their cultural awareness.

(Ofsted, 2013)

²³ For example, Samir: “They might come close to music and think what should I do, what should the response but they ask everybody why don’t you learn music so children should have a clear understanding – it’s not like, it shouldn’t be, don’t do this full stop. They should be made clear, look, this is the reason, why we wouldn’t teach this here, why we don’t promote it.”

²⁴ A position the school would naturally contest and, their arguments perhaps supported by the accounts of participants’ concerning ZPS pupils extensive consumption of mainstream media.

Some participants would contest this assertion (as will soon be evident) but for Samir, Zamzam Primary pupils were oblivious to aspects of secular culture (“they are sort of completely blind about the other side”) and mainstream lifestyles - a de facto admission of Ofsted’s assessment, although whether he had read the last Ofsted inspection statement was not clear. In addition, whether this alleged cultural blindness amongst pupils was a concern for Samir in the way it was for Ofsted was a different matter; his earlier remarks about a lack of exposure to “art, dance, music” would suggest it was not.

Hamud would also present a similar scenario to Samir when describing Zamzam Primary as a “bubble”:

The children come here they don’t have that – they haven’t been socialised into this world properly so as soon as they come – like I mentioned to you about that bubble – so as soon as they come into this school they’re in that bubble and when they come out of the school they’re met with a harsh reality and I’ve seen it so many times with the children where they can’t, they can’t seem to find their feet.

(Interview with researcher, Zamzam Primary School, June 2015)

In his account, Hamud acknowledged the process of socialisation and its impact upon the young. His use of a passive voice seems to have positioned the process as a downward cause (“they haven’t been socialised into this world properly”) albeit without specifying who and which causal mechanisms were responsible and thus making it difficult to identify whether this was a normative (and thus extra-organisational i.e. family and community) or configurational (and thus higher level organisational i.e. managerial) power and potential (Vincent & Wapshott, 2014). Revisiting the extract, I would propose that the latter of the two best fit his rationale. Conversely, daily routines and norm enforcement amongst actors can be understood as upwards normative causes for a closeted school culture at the actual level.

Hamud then went on to describe Zamzam Primary as a “bubble” as had participants in Martinez’s study of Florida Islamic School (2012). Moreover, in Zine’s study on Muslim schools in Canada, teaching participants would also employ the same term as well as similar enclosure metaphors such as “cocoon” (2008b: 117) when sharing their concerns about socially isolated religious environments. The external environment for Hamud was a “harsh reality” - as seen in his and other participants’

depictions of Queensbridge in chapter 4 - and when children inevitably entered this realm they became confused and disorientated (“they can’t seem to find their feet”). Hamud would later provide specific examples of the disorientation children might feel, caused by a clash of values:

Hamud: For the young boys, for example, they get taught to have that sort of haya, that modesty, around the girls but when they go out, the first thing you’re confronted with is a H&M poster!

Tom: (Laughs.)

H: With a woman wearing a bikini and it’s saying twenty-nine pounds.

T: I think I know the poster you mean!

H: (Laughs.) And these boys, you know, psychologically it scars them and it stays in their mind.

(Interview with researcher, Zamzam Primary School, June 2015)

In this account recorded in the summer of 2015, Hamud refers directly to one aspect of the ZPS mission: the cultivation of Islamic character. In doing so he provides a practical and gendered example: chivalrous and modest conduct amongst male students, especially in the company of the opposite gender (“they get taught to have that sort of haya, that modesty, around the girls”). However, upon leaving the guarded space of a Muslim school for a secular mainstream, Hamud suggested that (male) pupils experience an inverted form of Au’s “cultural discontinuity” (1993 & 2006) when confronted by sexualised images on advertising boards that not only result in initial disorientation but lasting internal damage (“psychologically it scars them and it stays in their mind”) as he saw it. Hamud’s observation reiterated the notion (articulated in chapter 4) of the Queensbridge local environment (and perhaps wider mainstream society beyond) as possessing certain negative qualities that residents imbibed and reproduced. Speaking independently when recalling his own experiences as a ZPS pupil, Shams would support Hamud’s assertion:

I don’t think that school even closely prepares you. When you come to Muslim schools the girls are all covered up and you’re taught that that is the right way and when you go to a Non-Muslim school you have girls in mini skirts showing their bodies off and it’s like: woh! Wow! I’m not used to this at all, I don’t know what to do and as a result you fall into the wrong things.

(Interview with researcher, Zamzam Primary School, July 2015)

British-Somali teenager Shams begins by echoing the notion of teachers that transition is inadequately managed. When a Muslim child enters mainstream environments, they encounter individuals dressing in a revealing, even sexualised manner (“girls in mini skirts showing their bodies off”). These observations appear to be very much from a heterosexual teenage boy’s point of view with a focus on the allure of the opposite gender. Shams then suggested that a connection exists between exposure to suggestive dress and individual inexperience (“Wow! I’m not used to this at all, I don’t know what to do”) which could lead to the sort of illicit sexual conduct (“you fall into the wrong things”) so strongly critiqued by many parents (see chapter 7.23). However, Hamud and Shams’s critique appears to born more of disappointment (at the disconnect between the closeted environment of ZPS and the secular mainstream) than despising, the latter a form of counter-othering in which non-Muslims, especially girls are caricatured “as lacking sexual mores and family protection” and are thus available for intimacy (Wilkinson, 2015: 30). It should also be noted that for Shams and Hamud, (male) students’ shock and awe originate and occur outside of the school bubble when confronted by societal lasciviousness: an extra-organisational downwards normative cause that impacted upon those inside the institution.

Year 1 teacher Zara would also outline the pitfalls of this transition whilst contemplating the similarities and differences between state and faith schools:

I think it’s gonna be overwhelming for them if they don’t go to an Islamic secondary school. Imagine, these children, they’ve gone learning Islamic ethos, praying on time- they’re going to secondary school, same values may not be there so no-one’s gonna ask them if they pray. They’re gonna go to an environment where boyfriend and girlfriend is gonna be the norm. They could either remember their Islamic values or they can say, you know what, I’m free now. No one’s watching me. I can do whatever I want. They may even get excited, you never know because I think they’re gonna be- because here they’re kind of like more controlled environment, isn’t it.

(Interview with researcher, Zamzam Primary School, October 2015)

In Zara’s estimation, Muslim pupils who have attended a Muslim primary school will feel engulfed upon entry into a state secondary school when left to their own devices with regards to the performance of prayer. Moreover, illicit relationships are not only prevalent and acceptable (“boyfriend and girlfriend is gonna be the norm “)

but accessible (“I can do whatever I want “), unregulated (“I’m free now. No one’s watching me”) as well as enticing (“They may even get excited“). Such bewilderment articulated by Zara, plus Hamud and Shams previously, appears indicative of the strained contact between the conservative’s 6-point moral matrix (with its onus on sanctity) and the liberal’s 3-point value system prioritising liberty (and thus extending to individual relationships and sexual politics), in a way that their respective blind spots regarding the other’s ethical positions could not anticipate (Haidt, 2012). Zara would also suggest that this was a reaction to the more regulated space of ZPS, an inverted form of religious freedom in which teenagers could choose not to follow the tenets of their faith (unlike those teachers and pupils in ZPS who enjoy opportunities afforded to observe Islam, from prayer to clothing). Finally, Zara’s concerns about potential illicit relationships would also be echoed by parents and cited as a main reason for sending their children to Zamzam Primary (see chapter 7.23).

Maryam would also be critical of what she felt was the “controlled environment“ of ZPS, acknowledging the difficulties pupils might encounter upon departure from the school:

Tom: What about children who leave ZPS for mainstream secondary state schools? Do you think experiences here will shape them positively or negatively?

Maryam: I think they will have a culture shock to some extent. Er, I don’t think that they would be able to- it will take them some time to adapt but then they pick up a lot of bad habits. Erm, I don’t think they’d have enough here to help them stand on their feet and, erm, manage in a mainstream school.

T: What is it we’re not doing here to prepare pupils for transition?

M: I just think mainstream school is more like what real life is like in the UK because you’re going to meet people from different class, backgrounds, religions, family structures, opinions and here it’s like, er, just the one way. You don’t meet people who have, you know- it’s a majority of one ethnicity here as well so you don’t get that, er, special interaction. I went to a mainstream school, I went to girls’ schools, I’ve met with so many, you know, different types of people; different countries, races, religions whatever. I’ve worked in that environment as well so I don’t have problems working with people from different religions and backgrounds, it’s not an issue for me but I think If you go to an Islamic school, from a young age, all the way up and then go to a mainstream school I do think it will be a struggle.

(Interview with researcher, Zamzam Primary School, October 2015)

In the extract above, Maryam contrasts a superdiverse state sector (“you’re going to meet people from different class, backgrounds, religions, family structures, opinions”) with a monolithic, myopic and insular (“mainstream school is more like what real life is like in the UK”) religious culture in Zamzam Primary, compounded by a preponderance of one ethnic group. Again, Maryam did not expand further who this majority were, perhaps because I would know as her colleague or perhaps she didn’t want to say. Nevertheless, this state of affairs was contrasted with the variety of Maryam’s own experiences of education and employment and her interactions with “people from different class, backgrounds, religions, family structures, opinions.” In our discussion - the empirical level of reality - Maryam positioned herself as an individual who could traverse different strata of society with ease (“it’s not an issue for me”) although her later remarks about being able to offer prayer and wear the clothing of her choice in ZPS – unlike in other work environments - might suggest events in the actual domain may have differed somewhat (see chapter 6:3). Zamzam pupils, however, were depicted as closeted and at risk of suffering from a cultural incongruity not dissimilar to the one Hamud described (“they will have a culture shock to some extent”). The difficult transition from faith to state school was also exacerbated by the inadequate support provided by Zamzam Primary as an institution, resulting in an independent repetition of an idiom used by Hamud (“I don’t think they’d have enough here to help them stand on their feet”). This pessimistic assessment of inadequate support mechanisms, can be understood as a downwards configurational cause for difficult transitions into the mainstream (Vincent & Wapshott, 2014). Nevertheless, there is a suggestion that children would eventually find their way independently in this new terrain (“it will take them some time to adapt”).

Samir would imply the same:

Eventually they go along with them, they don’t feel any problem with this practising their faith cause the wider society is very well responsive and welcoming, it’s not like: oh, you the alien what you gonna do!

(Interview with researcher, Zamzam Primary School, October 2015)

Having depicted ZPS’s bubble and the ensuing disorientation children suffer when acclimatising to the mainstream, Samir conceded that pupils would eventually adapt.

In doing so, he implicitly identified the enactment of legislation enshrining religious rights (for example, see ACAS, 2003) alongside a culture of inclusivity and tolerance found in modern workplaces and schools (“wider society is very well responsive and welcoming”) in a way that other colleagues did not, especially when describing their own struggles when trying to implement the prayer, or a sensation of awkwardness when asserting their Islamic identity through clothing or language. One might speculate that the outside world was perceived to be more problematic by many participants than it actually was, a perception reinforced by a prevailing groupthink and confirmation bias in a relatively close-knit (and closed) community. Of all the teaching participants I interviewed, Samir was arguably the most invested and immersed in the Zamzam (and QIC) mission as a true believer, yet also exhibited an awareness and acceptance of the openness of mainstream society, in contravention to some of his more conservative beliefs (for example, regarding the arts) and those of his colleagues. Returning to Maryam, integration was feasible but came at a price (“they pick up a lot of bad habits”).

So far in this chapter of data analysis, I have explored how my participants felt that an Islamic ethos and curriculum were the defining features of the Muslim school. In their view, this guarded space preserved pupils’ innate innocence by cocooning them from elements of mainstream society, be it cultures or lifestyles that might contravene orthodox Islamic values. In the next section I examine the views of participants who challenged this assertion and saw similarities between the state and faith sector as exemplified by Zamzam Primary.

5.5 State and Muslim Schools: Same Difference

Having heard from a number of (predominantly teaching) participants who suggested that Zamzam Primary was a bubble-like environment from which closeted pupils would struggle to transition to the mainstream, I now share the views of those participants who felt that similarities in curriculum, teaching, learning and institutional cultures made state and Muslim schools (specifically ZPS) essentially one and the same. Sumayah would expand upon the reasons for these similarities between state and Muslim schools:

Sumayah: I think there's lots of things similar. You'd be surprised. Other than the fact a lot of people are dressed differently and the way you approach people but other than that, teaching, learning, even managing is all the same. Literally, there's no difference.

Tom: Why do you think there's no difference?

S: I think we have to adhere to all the same rules and stuff isn't it at the end of the day.

T: And which rules would those be?

S: Because there's certain standards we have to follow and certain ways that a school has to operate whether you're an independent school or not you're under scrutiny anyway besides the parents have a certain level of expectations so they don't want to go to a moalama.

(Interview with researcher, Zamzam Primary School, July 2015)

Sumayah began with an assertion ("I think there's lots of things similar") to confound existing expectations ("You'd be surprised") albeit without clearly specifying whose expectations these were. The "you" could have been specifically a reference to myself, but I'm inclined to think its usage was more generalised and was directed at a homogenised wider Muslim community. Sumayah then addressed the external effect of the Muslim school ("a lot of people are dressed differently") and the nature of, one suspects, gender interactions ("the way you approach people" – I discuss these topics in greater detail in chapter 6.42) as being superficial differences that were inconsequential in light of the similarity between day-to-day operations ("teaching, learning, even managing is all the same"). What's especially fascinating is that Sumayah's comments can be understood as providing an underlying structure, shaping events at the actual level: state and independent schools operate under the same framework ("we have to adhere to all the same rules," "there's certain standards we have to follow") with accompanying accountability ("you're under scrutiny anyway") – evidence of an Ofsted-inspired coercive isomorphism (discussed in greater detail in the next section). Furthermore, parents want a school that provides what a state school delivers, as opposed to the limited scope of madrasa employing "Moalama" (religious teachers most likely unaccredited by Western institutions) teaching predominantly Islamic sciences.

Many parents would agree with teaching staff in asserting that there were some similarities between the Muslim school and the state school, at least concerning what

was taught. Somalia-born Hamda, a mother to two boys and a girl in ZPS, would assert that children “learn the same thing... the national curriculum,” a notion corroborated by a number of her peers. For example, Junaid – a convert to Islam with four children in ZPS - would mention the case of Zamzam Primary specifically, as would Aaqib. Pupils Shams and Yasmeen agreed in their assessment:

Junaid: I suppose I would call the school Muslim as opposed to Islamic simply because the majority of what the children learn there is simply secular academia in accordance with the National Curriculum. The Islamic teachings are a small percentage of the overall school programme.

(Email interview with researcher, July 2016)

Aaqib: Obviously, in Zamzam Primary we follow the national curriculum anyway so it doesn't matter which science, there's not going to be any difference in what they study at Zamzam Primary in a mainstream primary school.

(Interview with researcher, Zamzam Primary School, July 2015)

Yasmeen: An Islamic School is similar to a state school with regards to the lessons and education taught. Both schools follow the national curriculum set by the government.

(Email interview with researcher, July 2016)

Shams: You have the same types of lessons, it doesn't matter about your religion, in school you're gonna learn basic English, Maths, so that's similarities.

(Interview with researcher, Zamzam Primary School, July 2015)

In his reflections, White British/Jamaican parent Junaid differentiated the Muslim school from the Islamic school in a manner not too dissimilar to Lawson (2005). Without providing a lengthy explanation for his rationale, Junaid noted that most lessons followed a mainstream model (“the majority of what the children learn there is simply secular academia in accordance with the national curriculum”). Aaqib would independently reiterate such sentiments asserting that “there's not going to be any difference” a position carrying a certain credibility on account of his own experience and expertise as a teacher. Shams would also corroborate Junaid, Aaqib and Yasmeen's accounts by providing specific examples of national curriculum lessons taught: “basic English, Maths.” In this way, Junaid, Aaqib, Yasmeen and Shams shared a stance similar to a number of Zamzam Primary teaching staff and external commentators, including Kucukcan (1998), Breen (2009) and Niehaus (2011) concerning the division of secular and religious subjects in Muslim schools. Junaid also remarked that Islamic teachings constituted only a small proportion of

what pupils actually learnt, but without clearly stating whether they were incorporated into core subjects or not.

Mahmoud would express similar sentiments to the adults and children above but concerning Muslim schools as a whole and going into greater detail:

Tom: How would you define a Muslim school? Is it different or similar to a state school?

Mahmoud: They're not different in my point of view. Both schools, they're not actually different. They're actually the same. There's public schools where the teachers are not happy with certain subjects that are taught and they're really uneasy about it and there's actually an article on the news where it said a teacher refused to teach certain topics and he got penalised for it so um, they actually are the same but um, the whole core values of a particular school that is really the issue....

To understand your faith you have to be educated anyway and that brings out the education aspect as well but I think public schools or Islamic schools they're both the same; it's just the core values that differs and that's maybe what makes a Islamic school more appealing than a public school.

(Interview with researcher, Zamzam Primary School, July 2015)

Mahmoud saw similarities between state and Muslim schools to the point where they were identical, thus independently echoing ideas expressed earlier by Sumayah. One might ask if Mahmoud's outlook was informed by the fact that he was not only a parent using the school's services but an employee too possessing insider information. However, Junaid was not a member of staff at ZPS yet saw some overlap in teaching and learning in the two sectors, as previously noted. Notwithstanding, in drawing a comparison between state schools and Muslim schools ("they're not actually different"), Mahmoud would simultaneously discern a point of divergence in ethos (it's just the core values that differs"), perhaps reiterating points made by a number of parents concerning what made a school Islamic.

Adil, who having just proposed that there was little difference in what was taught in between Muslim and state schools, ("we're in England, the curriculum is more or less the same as the national curriculum"), suggested that - outwardly at least - pupils themselves were also similar:

If you look at a child- if you were to bump into two random children, one that goes to a Muslim school, one that goes to a state school, more often than not you couldn't tell the difference.

(Interview with researcher, Zamzam Primary School, October 2015)

What is not clear from this extract, however, is if Adil was referring to two Muslim children or a Muslim and Non-Muslim child. Revisiting the original text, I'm inclined to think Adil meant the first, thus implying he believed that sending a Muslim child to a state or Muslim school had little impact upon their religious practice. Walford would draw similar conclusions in his study of Al-Furqan, a Muslim school:

For the majority of the time, students were the same as other students in other schools with the formality of the classroom, focus on necessary curricula such as arithmetic, chattering between children and being told off when misbehaving all being present as in many schools.

(Walford, 2003: 167 in Breen, 2009: 51)

A'rfa, who in describing her relocation from Maidstone in the home counties to Queensbridge, suggested that the children in ZPS were not just "the same as other students in other schools" but even more street-savvy than those she attended school with in Kent:

A'rfa: I feel like the children had more confidence and they were more in touch with latest trends and things like that and, you know, the language and fashion: things like that.

Tom: In comparison to what?

A: To what I had experienced in Maidstone.

(Skype interview with researcher, researcher's home, February 2016)

Although A'rfa herself was a teen when she began working at ZPS, pupils were more aware of the "latest trends" in "language and fashion." This might have been attributable to a "London effect" (for example, see Cheshire et al, 2008 on inventive adolescent linguistic practices in London and Block, 2006, on innovation in the global city) although A'rfa did not provide any further explanation other than to compare the state of affairs with life in Maidstone. Did A'rfa's remarks thus counter Ofsted's critique of a lack of "cultural awareness" amongst pupils? In an earlier study, I noted the proliferation of popular culture (as opposed to the "high" art

perhaps desired by Ofsted) and awareness of the “latest trends” amongst Zamzam Primary’s year 5&6 pupils alongside references to Islamic notables:

The classroom environment was replete with talk of Manchester United, James Bond, the Incredible Hulk, Gangnam Style²⁵ and the Harlem Shake²⁶ albeit juxtaposed with Allah, the Prophet Muhammad and Sheikh Abdul Basset.²⁷
(Evans, 2013: 57)

This natural and negotiable juxtaposition of the religious and secular in the faith school environment shares some parallels with Fader’s “Mitzvah Girls” in a Hasidic Jewish community based in Brooklyn, New York:

Although Hasidic girls go to private Hasidic schools, are forbidden from watching television or going to the movies, they are hardly living in hermetically sealed communities in the middle of Brooklyn. Mainstream English language books and magazines are within easy reach.
(Fader, 2008: 634)

Similarly, in Zine’s study of Muslim schools in Canada, a teaching participant disclosed how girls “had crushes on boy bands like the Backstreet Boys and ‘N Sync and would bring their pictures to school” (2008a: 43) whilst students in Martinez’s Florida Islamic School “rapped or sang their favorite lines from the latest Top 40 hits, and discussed heartthrobs such as Drake or Zayn Malik from One Direction, whose hair ‘looks so good you could eat it’” (2012: 74). Notwithstanding, other participants (all being teachers but one parent too) in my study would agree with A’rfa’s observations of Zamzam Primary as a site in which mainstream and Islamic cultures intersected; this was not a “hermetically sealed community” contrary to the perception of some of the patrons of the school.

I now return to Sumayah and Rumaysah who deconstructed the idea of the utopic Muslim school closed off to the insidious influences of the external world. Rumaysah began by speaking in the voice of a parent invested in the ideal of an idyllic environment:

Rumaysah: “If I bring my kid to the mosque, they’re gonna learn here, the school’s going to teach them about adab and akhlaq and they’re gonna learn Qur’an, they’re

²⁵ A hit “K-pop” song from 2012 and, at the time, the most watched video in the history of YouTube with over 2 billion views.

²⁶ Another hit song with a distinct dance popularised by flash mobs.

²⁷ A famous Qur’an reciter from Egypt.

gonna- all these things and then my child is gonna turn around teenager and be God fearing,” but that’s not the reality.

Tom: Why is it not a reality?

R: Because the parents don’t live that lifestyle themselves. Cause I’ve seen kids in this school and they will watch X-Factor.

T: Yeah-

R: Or they would-

Sumayah: What does that boy in your class say? I wasn’t watching Netflix.

R: I wasn’t watching Netflix and I’m like- and the other kids are like, what’s Netflix?

S: Not that it’s anything bad.

R: I don’t think that it’s anything bad I’m just saying that parents should be honest with their kid.

S: Yeah or children would come out and say my mum listens to music.

R: Yeah I’ve heard that from kids in my class: my mum- my mum listens to music.

T: Yeah.

R: But says I shouldn’t.

S: Yes.

R: I don’t say- some of the kids in my class say is it haram to go to the cinema. I don’t tell them its haram because I take my little niece and I take my little nephew.
(Interview with researcher, Zamzam Primary School, July 2015)

In their discussion, Rumaysah and Sumayah provide specific examples of the creative disciplines Samir, Adil and Sarah had earlier outlined as contentious amongst socially conservative Muslim communities (“art, dance, music”). Whilst some families might send their children to Muslim schools - and Zamzam Primary specifically - to shield them from aspects of popular culture they found immoral (as noted by Driessen & Valkenberg, 2000; Merry, 2005; Coles, 2008; Niyoz & Memon, 2011 and Suleiman, 2012 - as will become more evident in chapter 7) other classmates and their parents were actually watching the likes of “X-Factor” and “Netflix” alongside films in cinemas. They then imported mainstream ideas, expressions and artefacts consumed in the home and elsewhere into the “sanctified” school environment – an extra-organisational downwards normative cause (Vincent

& Wapshott, 2014). The situation was exacerbated by parental inconsistency - even hypocrisy (“parents should be honest with their kid”) - prescribing abstinence but practising indulgence (“parents don’t live that lifestyle themselves”). One might ask how and why Rumaysah and Sumayah were privy to their pupils’ television viewing patterns and music consumption in a way their colleagues might not have been. For example, Zamzam pupils would openly disclose family life outside of school (“children would come out and say my mum listens to music”) to Rumaysah and Sumayah. This might have been the case because they were young, outgoing and accessible practitioners (in the manner of “Mr Lawrence” in Hyacinth Evans’s 2006 ethnography of an urban Jamaican school) who enjoyed a more open relationship with pupils in a way other teachers might not. For example, as the school’s Qur’an teacher, Samir’s aforementioned movements between classes on a daily basis meant there were potentially fewer opportunities to engage in longer-lasting interactions forming more meaningful bonds with students as one might do as a class teacher - although this did not prove any aloofness and inaccessibility on his part. Moreover, Hamud was also equally youthful, extroverted and easy-going in temperament and teaching style (which I was well-aware of as a colleague) yet shared an outlook closer to Samir’s. Perhaps the informality and approachability enjoyed by Rumaysah and Sumayah were on account of their being female; A’rfa had suggested gender played a part when discussing the blurred boundaries (a topic discussed in greater detail in chapter 6.44) between staff, parents and pupils:

A’rfa: I’ve noticed there’s a divide- there’s more of a distance with the students with the male staff than there is with female staff-

Tom: Really?

A: Because we’re quite motherly with the students.

(Skype interview with researcher, researcher’s home, February 2016)

Regardless of the above speculation (and potential gender stereotyping on A’rfa’s part regarding “motherly” female staff), concerning explanations for events at the actual level, Rumaysah and Sumayah were adamant that Zamzam Primary did not cocoon pupils from mainstream culture. The conversation continues:

Rumaysah: There’s some kids that I know celebrate birthdays.

Sumayah: Yeah.

R: And I don't say to them because my little nephew and niece have a birthday party and stuff.

Tom: Have we adequately prepared kids for the real world here if we've protected them or is there even a bubble here?

S: No there isn't a bubble.

R: No.

S: Because even those kids who do live in a bubble they pick up things.

T: Yeah, yeah.

S: There are kids in my class who don't have TV and they're- and they're singing, like, that Frozen²⁸ song.

R: (Laughs) "Let It Go!"

T: (Laughs.)

S: They don't have a TV and they tell you heard it from others.

T: Yeah.

S: So there's no- there is no bubble.

T: Do you think parents sending their kids here are under the impression there is a bubble?

S: Yes, some are.

R: Some are.

S: Some are under the impression there is a bubble and that is why they want to protect them. Even today, there was a parent saying she's too scared to send her kids to a state school because she thinks, you know, it's going to mess up their-

T: Yeah, yeah.

S: But yeah, it's unfortunate.

T: Do you think children are insulated from certain types of behaviour here but not mainstream culture?

R: I don't think even behaviour because these kids have got other cousins or relatives that go to other schools-

S: Because there were some-

²⁸ A popular Disney animated film (2013).

R: And they would show- It's like if a kid swears, right, they will still swear in front of their cousins and then these little kids will pick it up and they will say it; do you understand? So I think you can't do that, you can't. It doesn't work and I think parents know that.

(Interview with researcher, Zamzam Primary School, July 2015)

Rumaysah begins by articulating an orthodox Islamic position – the prohibition of frequenting cinemas and celebrating of birthdays – and her own discomfort enforcing religious interdicts when she herself being “inconsistently orthodox” (Peshkin, 1986: 171) violates them (“my little nephew and niece have a birthday party and stuff”). Sumayah then contests the idea of Zamzam Primary as an enclosed space, asserting that this supposedly quarantined zone can be breached and subsequently influenced and affected by ideas acquired elsewhere, in this instance, Disney songs (“They don't have a TV and they tell you heard it from others”) or profane language (“if a kid swears, right, they will still swear in front of their cousins and then these little kids will pick it up”). In addition to these themes, I did encounter evidence of numerous mainstream materials used for teaching, including a world book day activity and display based on the popular “Hunger Games” series of novels and films (refer to figure 6).

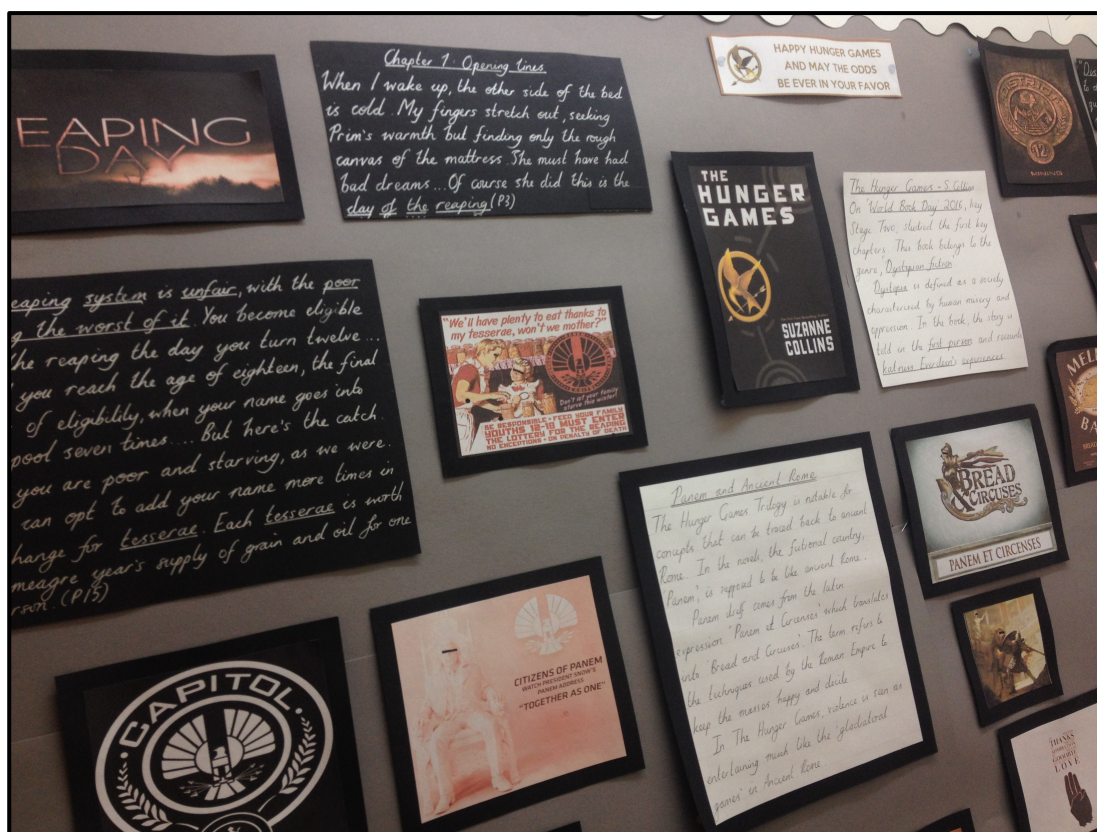


Figure 6: A “Hunger Games” Display in Zamzam Primary School (March, 2016)

Nevertheless, the notion of the school as an impregnable environment (“Some are under the impression there is a bubble”) against less salubrious aspects of mainstream culture and thus being a secure space (“that is why they want to protect them”) did prevail amongst parents, acting as a driver for enrolling their children in Zamzam Primary (see chapter 7). The alternative - sending children to a state school – presented a threat to children’s spiritual welfare: “there was a parent saying she’s too scared to send her kids to a state school because she thinks, you know, it’s going to mess up.”

Dasham would articulate similar sentiments to his colleagues when contemplating why parents sent their children to ZPS:

From what I know, money is still an issue but they choose to sacrifice to send their children to independent schools, especially Muslim schools, because the fact that from their perspective society is corrupt and they don’t want to expose their children to that which, in a way, as we spoke earlier, is kind of a bubble cause nowadays we’ve got the internet!

(Interview with researcher, UCL Institute of Education, June 2015)

In his reflections, Dasham echoes the parental concerns as envisioned, encountered and subsequently articulated by Rumaysah and Sumayah (“from their perspective society is corrupt”); immersion in the wider world has serious consequences so parents chose to send their children to Muslim schools to safeguard them from what is “out there” (“they don’t want to expose their children to that”). Dasham questions the accuracy of such myopic visions and isolationist positions with a simple dismissal – “nowadays we’ve got the internet!” Whilst Rumaysah, Sumayah, A’rfa and Dasham would probably all agree on this issue, in chapter 7.21 I present further first-hand accounts from parents attesting to the impenetrability of the Muslim school and its ability to protect the inherent innocence of children.

Presently, Aaqib questions this notion of “blocking” out the outside world in the Muslim school as documented below. The extract begins with Aaqib having just conversed about the nature of the Muslim school and its incorporation of mainstream norms in a process of institutional isomorphism in order to validate its schoolness:

Tom: Do you think some parents see the Muslim school as a bubble from the trials and temptations of the outside world?

Aaqib: Yeah, I would say most of them, myself included, would to protect them from sort of influences outside. I don’t know how effective the school is because I think just like there are influences from kids outside-

T: There are influences from kids within an Islamic school.

A: Definitely. Cause we’re living within the same society, yeah for example someone was telling me in a Muslim school they were talking about songs.

T: Yeah.

A: Talking about East Enders these kind of things so you’ll have similar kinds of discussions because the popular culture out there- the youth culture out there is gonna be the same for Muslims or Non-Muslims.

T: I think I perhaps had an idealised idea of the above-

A: In fact, even if you went to Muslim countries you’d have the same films, the same songs which are there, you know!

(Interview with researcher, Zamzam Primary School, July 2015)

In his reflections, Aaqib casts doubt on the impregnable environment of the Muslim school that safeguards pupils from mainstream culture. In this way, his outlook resembles that of teachers like Rumaysah and Sumayah rather than the majority of his fellow parents. Nevertheless, Aaqib begins by aligning his view with that of other parents – although this appears more to be an assumption of their perceptions – when explaining why he sent his children to ZPS: “to protect them from sort of influences outside.” He immediately follows this by questioning how effective ZPS is in guarding children from negative influences when students themselves import ideas, expressions and artefacts into the space – an upwards normative cause that affects the atmosphere and culture of the institution as a whole. The notion that the Muslim school is an isolated bubble loses further credence when one notes that Muslims share the same space with citizens who do not share their faith (“Cause we’re living within the same society”). Examples of this permeability were children in a certain Muslim school – not Zamzam Primary - discussing music and soap operas, something that would take place even in Muslim countries. The latter comment perhaps suggests valorisation of Muslim-majority nations as promised land(s) where an idealised Islam is observed - although not necessarily a view held by Aaqib - that might have prompted Queensbridge community members to migrate and study their religion in such sanctified spaces (see chapter 6.1).

In this section I have shared the views of “scorner” teaching participants who questioned established norms in Zamzam Primary. Of greatest importance was their challenging the idea that the Muslim school, and ZPS in particular, was a bubble that blocked access to less palatable elements of mainstream culture. Pupils consumed pop culture in their own lives and often imported aspects of television and music into school. Whilst no parents voiced such views, a number of them did argue that the delivery of the national curriculum contributed to a similarity between Zamzam Primary and state schools. In the next section, I share the views of participants who felt Ofsted accountability resulted in the implementation of policies and procedures that contributed to a Zamzam Primary’s increasing resemblance to a state school.

5.6 Ofsted

In this section, I will share how a number of teaching participants shared their (generally negative) experiences of Ofsted inspections at Zamzam Primary, situating their views in a wider context of neoliberalism, the marketisation of education and a highly politicised climate, with intense scrutiny of Muslim schools. In this way, they provided empirical examples of events at the actual level that can be attributed to the “complex interplay between changes in organizational forms and control regimes to deeper structural changes within the political economy of capitalism” (Rees and Gatenby 2014: 7). Or, as Erickson articulates more simply, “most of what happens inside the school is somehow related to what happens outside it” (1984: 8).

Throughout the interviews, the underlying processes for changes in daily practice were seen by participants to have been initiated by an external agency - Ofsted - and can thus be understood as extra-organisational downward normative causes for events and actions in school. In turn, these were then transferred upon higher level organisational systems and management in Zamzam Primary and thus enacted as downwards configurational causes for policy, procedure and practice (Vincent & Wapshott, 2014): a coercive isomorphism. Whilst I could have included participant accounts of interactions with Ofsted in chapter 6.4 (“The Disadvantages of Teaching in Zamzam Primary”), I have incorporated them here because of their relevance to conceptualisations of and practices within the Muslim school. More specifically, I discuss how these philosophies and procedures can be understood, influenced and even altered at the causal level by external actors and agencies (i.e. Ofsted), in turn informing the outlook and affecting the experiences of those within the immediate school community.

I begin this section of data analysis with the thoughts of Sumayah, who provides a brief sketch of the demands placed on an independent school like Zamzam Primary by an external inspection regime:

Tom: Sumayah, you referred to the school having to conform earlier. I didn’t want to prompt you too much but did you mean Ofsted?

Sumayah: Partly Ofsted, partly parents, the LEAs, everything, isn’t it? There’s lots of scrutiny so at the end of the day, they have to be seen as professional, you have to be seen as doing certain things or running the school in a certain way.

T: If that's the case, how independent can a school like this be?

S: I think it depends on the leader. If you do have a revolutionary leader with a vision they would try and get people on board and change certain things but I think it's hard: you would have to think outside of the box.

T: Can that occur in conservative Muslim communities?

S: Not in Muslim schools because you are under more scrutiny than other schools, say. Also there has to be an alternative. What's the alternative? If you throw out the rulebook, as you say, throw out adhering to Ofsted and their standards, following the national curriculum, what is there? You need an alternative to buy into; or someone needs to come up with something else.

T: Do you think anyone in our communities could come up with that?

S: No, cause they're still in that stage where they're establishing themselves.
(Interview with researcher, Zamzam Primary School, July 2015)

In the modern school, demands are placed on staff by a number of external individuals and institutions ("Partly Ofsted, partly parents, the LEAs"). The work that practitioners do is closely observed and they are required to meet exacting standards although what these were was not articulated – perhaps because I would know as a colleague and teaching professional. In addition, Sumayah's wording could be interpreted to mean that this professionalism is performed to assuage the intrusions of external observers, be they inspectors or parents ("you have to be seen as doing certain things") and might not be consistently applied in their absence. Nevertheless, Sumayah seemingly exhibits acceptance of existing systems and processes of normative isomorphism (professionalism) when questioning what the alternative would be to disregarding Ofsted guidance and the national curriculum. With inspirational guidance at a managerial level ("If you do have a revolutionary leader with a vision"), one might be able to develop a different model but this is unlikely amongst many Muslim communities with their existing social struggles ("they're still in that stage where they're establishing themselves") as outlined in the literature review and in chapter 4. Moreover, Muslim schools are subjected to an interrogating gaze ("you are under more scrutiny than other schools") in a way their mainstream counterparts are not, although Sumayah did not go into further detail; perhaps because I would be well acquainted with the current political climate as a co-religionist working in a Muslim school.

Saffiyah, would then provide a fascinating insight into the minutiae of daily operations in ZPS and how these are informed, and in some ways dictated, by the interests and interdicts of HM's inspectorate:

Tom: How does the work you do relate to the demands of Ofsted.

Saffiyah: In what sense?

T: I'm trying to word it very carefully.

S: British values?

T: Well, you said it! Tell me more.

S: I know that from our last support visit they weren't very happy- by the way, the nursery is not private. Zamzam Nursery is not private. It's government funded. I know from the last time they came they weren't very pleased with us having Islamic studies and Qur'an on our planning as a whole. Erm, we had our medium term planning, which we planned for the term. They weren't happy we had- because they said that it's meant to be, see, a government funded nursery; any race or religion is allowed in, why did they had to be specifically taught only Qur'an and Islamic Studies so that, unfortunately, had to be taken out.

T: Oh really.

S: Yeah.

T: You still teach Qur'an though. Is it done differently or something?

S: We don't- a lot of our activities are not based around Islam the way they used to be.

T: Right.

S: So we have had to switch it up a bit. We did try to tell them it is demands of the parents: a lot of them want their children to learn Qur'an, that's why they send them here. You know, they want them to have an Islamic education, hence why they come to the nursery.

T: Could you expand upon what you mean by "government funded?"

S: Just like a school, basically. The school's private, so you're allowed to teach whatever you like under your curriculum basically. You're allowed to teach Islamic Studies and Qur'an because it's government funded there are certain things we're allowed to teach and certain things we aren't.

(Interview with researcher, Zamzam Primary School, November 2015)

During the period of research and data collection, there had been much discussion in mainstream media outlets concerning "British values" and their teaching (or lack of) in independent faith schools - especially Muslim schools (see also Breen, 2009). In

particular, a “moral panic” (Hebdige, 1979) arose over the alleged “Trojan Horse” plot in which an ultra-conservative curriculum would be introduced by stealth in a number of Muslim-majority schools in Birmingham (see Miah, 2015). In this extract Saffiyah broaches the topic of British values, perhaps suggesting how salient they were in the minds of Muslim teaching professionals at that time. Saffiyah then clarified that Zamzam’s nursery was effectively separate to the main school and not entirely a private fee-paying institution – parents who enrol their children in the nursery were eligible for a 15 hours of free childcare paid for by the government every week.²⁹ Because of such extra-organisational downwards normative and then configurational normative causes (Vincent & Wapshott, 2014), the ZPS nursery was obliged to follow a particular syllabus and could not teach explicitly religious subjects as – in theory at least – the nursery was open to all (“any race or religion is allowed in”).³⁰ Nevertheless, Zamzam nursery practitioners still incorporated the teaching of the Qur’an into their timetable – a set of circumstances I was privy to as a ZPS employee as well as researcher. To accomplish this, educators used inventive methods although it was “very difficult” and one had to be “careful in what you say and what you do.” What emerges in Saffiyah’s account is a tension between parental perception of an authentic Islam observed and taught in school and institutional practice, the latter dictated by statutory requirements. Parents enrolled their children in the nursery – as did those in the main school – because they wanted their sons and daughters to benefit from an explicitly Islamic education. What this entailed, besides imparting the Qur’an and Islamic Studies, Saffiyah did not discuss in more detail at the empirical level. However, at the actual level, practitioners were constrained in the delivery of curricula on account of government regulation (“there are certain things we’re allowed to teach and certain things we aren’t”), although exhibited initiative, imagination and industry to work around legislature in order to cater to the Queensbridge community’s desire and demand for religious education delivered in a socially conservative environment, outwardly at least.

²⁹ Additional hours were charged at £5.50 an hour (www.zamzamprimary.co.uk, 2016).

³⁰ As is, in theory, ZPS although the reality is no Non-Muslims had yet enrolled their children in the school’s ten-year existence. Having sat in on staff and governor’s meetings this subject had been discussed with both teachers and management open to accepting Non-Muslim pupils with the appropriate provision made for their faith or non-faith needs. However, with no Non-Muslim pupils enrolled this had yet to be realised and was effectively conjecture.

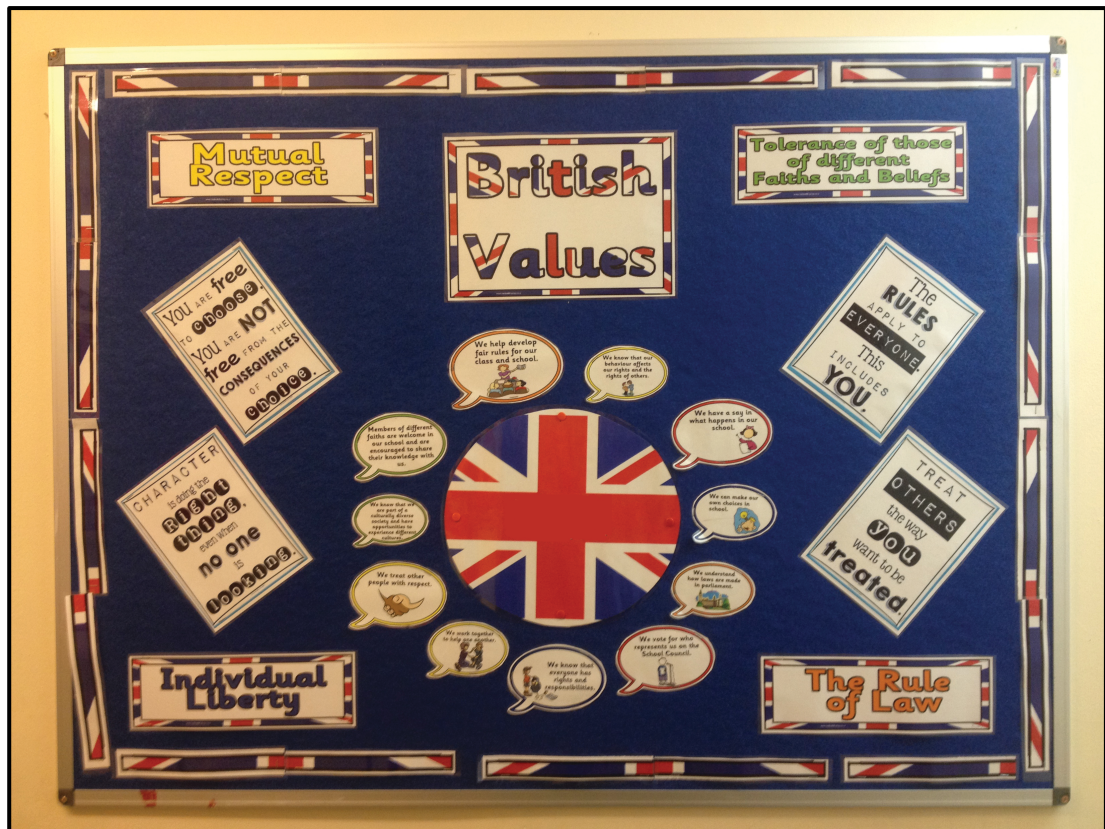


Figure 7: A “British Values” Display in Zamzam Primary School

After a brief explanation of the actual funding process, the discussion continues with Saffiyah making a distinction between Zamzam Primary School and its nursery. The former is a Muslim school whereas...

Saffiyah: We’re not a faith nursery.

T: But do the parents who send their kids to the nursery see you-

S: No.

T: As a non-faith nursery?

S: No. No, they don’t.

T: Is there something written in your prospectus or policies and procedures?

S: No, I feel like because they think it’s linked to the school- because it’s linked to an Islamic school, because it’s the same - you’re all from one body in a sense - you’d think that’s a Muslim school.

(Interview with researcher, Zamzam Primary School, November 2015)

Saffiyah suggested that the nursery's close proximity to Zamzam Primary contributed to the perception amongst parents of it being an authentically Muslim institution; unsurprisingly, they expected subjects such as Qur'an and Islamic studies to be taught. This state of affairs provides a tangible example of Lawson's original definition of a Muslim school: an institute that happens to be attended by Muslim children but does not necessarily have an overt and/or explicit Islamic philosophy of education (2005) whatever that might be. In the case of Zamzam Nursery, it appeared to be a Muslim nursery, with aspirations to being a nursery explicitly teaching Islam, that were curtailed (to some degree) by Ofsted's requirements.

Parent-governor Sami would also outline a similar set of circumstances to Saffiyah in the case of ZPS itself. In the extract below he explores (what I have interpreted to be) the downwards normative causes underpinning the constraints imposed upon Zamzam Primary (the recommendations of Ofsted) and the school's evolving practices, attributable to downwards configurational causes, namely managerial decision-making, over the years:

Sami: They want us to have school with same curriculum as outside with Muhammad was teaching, Abdul-Lateef was teaching and that's it and you teaching Arabic, you teaching English but you don't want to be really knowledgeable in Islam teaching those things, you know? It's just you pay to say you are Muslim school- you paying and it's Muslim school because is Muslim environment in the mosque but not like before. I don't know. You trusting the teacher is not only going to speak about Literacy he's going to tell the children about Islam every second, minute he's a role model, showing- we still have role model-

Tom: Sure, sure.

S: It's not the same.

T: Is that driven by Ofsted? Obviously, you had experiences of dealing with an inspection.

S: Yeah.

T: How was it for you dealing with what they wanted the school to deliver?

S: Ofsted, they don't want the school that we had before. Ofsted, they want the school that we have now. And more! Ofsted, what they want, they want teacher – as we said – Mohamed, Ahmed, come teach 1,2,3,4,5. They don't want the teacher that come influence the children Islamically. Okay, you want Muslim school, have your Muslim school, have your teachers that are Muslim, that are teaching what you ask to teach and that's it. That's what they want and that's what they get anyway, they are getting it slowly, slowly.

Throughout our discussion, Sami and his wife Marwa would recall a halcyon past (“is Muslim environment in the mosque but not like before”) wherein an authentic Islam underpinned and informed every aspect of teaching, learning and life in ZPS (“the school that we had before”). With time, Zamzam Primary evolved into a more professional yet less overtly Islamic institution in a process of normative isomorphism, as dictated by an unsympathetic inspection regime with a politicised agenda to impose secular values, policies and routines (“Ofsted, they want the school that we have now...”). Moreover, the process continued unabated to this day. Sami depicted a scenario in which Zamzam Primary was becoming a Muslim school just by name, quite literally: “they want teacher – as we said – Mohamed, Ahmed, come teach 1,2,3,4,5.” “Mohameds” and “Ahmeds” were hired in a tokenistic gesture to multiculturalism and inclusion, but required to deliver a secular syllabus (“same curriculum as outside”) devoid of any Islamic principles that might shape and mould pupils’ religiously (“They don’t want the teacher that come influence the children Islamically”). Whilst the Queensbridge community, and others like them, had been granted a freedom of sorts to establish their own educational institutions (“Okay, you want Muslim school, have your Muslim school”) employing whom they wish, (“have your teachers that are Muslim”), Ofsted’s recommendations – essentially de facto rulings - resulted in prescriptive policies and procedures that asphyxiated the independence of the school and compromised its very Islamicness. Governors were powerless to contest the judgements and recommendations of an all-powerful inspectorate (“that’s what they get anyway, they are getting it slowly, slowly”) who were “sanitising Islam, so that it accepts the neo-liberal secular consensus” (Miah, 2015: 37). This transformation at the micro-level affected the religious environment of this particular faith school, how secular subjects were taught in its Islamic setting and how religion itself was taught. In light of Sami’s remarks, elements of Adelhah and Sakurai’s observations on the evolution of the madrasa system in the Indian subcontinent become increasingly germane:

...Religious teaching becomes more bureaucratic and rational. And paradoxically, madrasahs, as a framework for teaching, end up by contributing in their own way to a certain secularization: ...by competing against, complimenting and offering synergies with state schools; by adjusting to a constant play between educational

supply and demand; and by ‘nationalizing’ themselves and validating the established state framework.

(Adelkhah & Keiko, 2011: 7)

“Religious teaching” and national curriculum subjects were certainly more “bureaucratic and rational” in Zamzam Primary as teachers engaged in assessment procedures that informed lesson planning which would be tracked and collected to use as evidence in Ofsted inspections. In addition, as a small faith school, ZPS might not have necessarily been “competing against” local (and even national) state schools at their level; nevertheless, it still operated in the educational market, for example, by children sitting SATs examinations and advertising the results on the school website, thus “validating the established state framework” – more so out of necessity than desire. Moreover, the independence of ZPS as an Islamic institution (granted, participants disagreed to what extent) was regulated or even compromised by its accountability to Ofsted and by enacting the inspection regime’s decrees contributed in its own way to a certain secularisation (to paraphrase Adelkhah & Keiko) of its curriculum that Sami lamented. Sami would sketch specific examples of the downward causes for Zamzam Primary being bent “into compliance with public policy or ideology” (Adelkhah & Keiko, 2011: 7) a bit later in our discussion:

Tom: As a governor how did you deal with Ofsted inspections?

Sami: To be honest with you, when Ofsted come our fear is just to ask us to stop the school so we are there because we don’t have strength, the power to overcome any decisions from them so when they say something, we say yes. We want this. Yes. We want this policy. Yes. We just say yes, yes, yes, yes. There is no saying no. We- you want it like this. We want it like this. There’s none of that at all so we doing what they want us to do and if they are not happy with something we say to them, okay, we will try. We are not compromising our Islam but we are trying.

(Interview with researcher, family home, October 2015)

Sami described a climate of anxiety, compounded by the community’s position of weakness as an economically deprived ethnic and religious minority striving to establish itself in the wider socio-political landscape (“we don’t have strength, the power to overcome any decisions from them”); something Sumayah alluded to earlier in her reflections. Accordingly, ZPS governors were compelled to abide by Ofsted “enforced values” (Miah, 2015: 36) even when they disagreed with the inspection body’s judgements (“when they say something, we say yes”). Sami’s depiction of Ofsted’s dictatorial tendencies can be interpreted as extra-organisational

downwards normative causes for institutional practices that were met with acquiescence by governors (“We want this. Yes. We want this policy. Yes”) – a downwards configurational cause. Sami’s account can also be understood to portray a process of coercive isomorphism resulting from “both formal and informal pressures exerted on organisations by other organisations upon which they are dependent and by expectations in the society within which the organisations function” (DiMaggio and Powell 1983: 150 in Breen, 2009: 23). ZPS governors experienced this Ofsted coercion less as “persuasion” and more “force,” the “organisational change... a direct response to government mandate” (DiMaggio and Powell 1983: 67 in Breen, 2009: 23) in a time of heightened scrutiny of Muslim schools - as previously alluded to by Saffiyah. Notwithstanding, Sami’s account ended somewhat positively and perhaps with a slight contradiction: having endured the full weight of Ofsted’s impositions and obeying accordingly (“we doing what they want us to do”), ZPS staff still somehow managed to maintain their faith values (“We are not compromising our Islam”). Whilst many parents would probably agree with such an assertion (see chapter 7.3), other staff members might be less convinced. I discuss my own impressions at the end of this chapter.

Dasham would also share his experiences of Ofsted inspections. In the preceding discussion, we had addressed the increased focus on Muslims in the mainstream media during recent times and an accompanying “trickle-down” effect experienced in exacting Ofsted inspections actively seeking to unearth and expose underperformance, unprofessionalism and even extremism:

Tom: You’ve experienced an Ofsted inspection; how independent can a school be, Muslim or otherwise, when they have to perform to Ofsted expectations?

Dasham: I think it’s unfortunately down to resources. I think if a school is well resourced they can resource that inspection and then they can free up the teachers to do the teaching to contribute to a child’s learning whereas if you’re in a small independent school that teacher and that head teacher will have to do everything. You have to work extra long hours just to sustain- to feed that whole inspection regime so I think- it’s a very tough call because, erm, you don’t want to get poor and you don’t want to fail your inspection and on the one hand you also want to educate the children so they learn and you want to gain benefit so it’s really challenging also with the added pressure of being a Muslim school, erm, and all the connotations that has.

(Interview with researcher, UCL Institute of Education, July 2015)

In his reflections, Dasham reiterated an issue raised by his colleagues in this chapter: facilities and finances. Whilst talking in a general sense (for example, “I think if a school is well resourced...”), the context of my question would suggest that Dasham was referencing his own experiences in Queensbridge at ZPS. Zamzam Primary was certainly “a small independent school” that was not “well resourced”, meaning staff were less equipped to address the stringent demands of an Ofsted visit (“that teacher and that head teacher will have to do everything”). Dasham then described the tireless exertions of teachers (“You have to work extra long hours”) in catering to Ofsted, portraying the organisation in a similar manner to Samir: a hungry beast that schools are compelled to pander to (“to feed that whole inspection regime”). This was because many schools, especially institutions like Zamzam Primary (as a Muslim school), were in a precarious position - vulnerable to negative assessments that could affect their standing in the marketplace (“you don’t want to get poor and you don’t want to fail your inspection”). Whilst there was still a desire for business as usual, teaching staff and management remained pragmatic during such difficult circumstances. In his account, Dasham exhibited an acceptance, albeit begrudging, of existing educational practices (that were a product of normative isomorphism) in a way other colleagues did; his position, however, seemed to be that of the pragmatic survivor who did what it took to ensure the school endured.

5.7 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have responded to research questions 1.1 and 1.2 by documenting and discussing participants’ perceptions of the Muslim school and the educational, cultural and religious ideologies, practices and artifacts therein. I demonstrated how my informants pinpointed a religious ethos and curriculum as making a Muslim School “Islamic” and what this entailed at the actual level in day-to-day practice encompassing clothing, food and ritual. In particular, the curriculum possessed spiritual (Qur’an, Arabic and Islamic Studies) and secular content that could be and at times was integrated but, more often than not, was partitioned. Some informants would go on to suggest that at one time in the past Zamzam Primary’s curriculum was entirely Islamicised, with a religious ethos determining what subjects were taught and how. Subsequently, Zamzam Primary had been compelled by Ofsted to adopt a more secular approach to education in a process of institutional isomorphism. Related to this was my weighing up the similarities and differences

between state and Muslim schools, with some participants suggesting that there was considerable overlap, especially in what was taught and how as well as exposure to and consumption of mainstream culture. Other participants felt the school was a “bubble” in which pupils were closeted and, as a consequence, were unaware and unprepared for the realities of life outside.

Having heard from participants, I outline my own stance concerning the opinions and experiences expressed. Inevitably, my position is situated not only by my etic view as an ethnographer but also by my emic view as an employee of ZPS. Firstly, it is my opinion that an Islamic ethos as an integral feature of the Muslim school was an underexplored concept amongst participants. There was an imprecision in informants’ accounts when attempting to articulate what constituted Islamic values. At the empirical level, this could have been attributable to insufficient interrogation on my part coupled with an acceptance of informant accounts that did not stretch participant understandings further. In addition, the fact that I was both colleague and researcher could contribute to certain ideas and “ultimates” being left unarticulated, based upon the assumption that I possessed a working knowledge of them as a coreligionist. Nevertheless, defining ethos became challenging when Islam itself was mostly presented as a monolithic institution (“Qur’an and Sunnah”) and despite participant calls for and even a celebration of ethnic, cultural and linguistic diversity in the previous chapter, intra-religious diversity of the sort mentioned in the chapter 2.1 (i.e. the presence of different traditions of Sunni Islam in the UK, for example, Barelwi Sufis; Deobandis and the Ahl al-Hadith as well as Shi’a groups) was not really acknowledged or discussed here.

Just as ethos was an underdeveloped concept amongst informants at all levels so was curriculum. At the actual level, this lack of reflection might have been a product of the day-to-day demands of teaching in both the state and faith sectors, that leave little time for deeper philosophical reflection on the part of professionals regarding the underlying mechanisms and structures of education at the causal level.

Regardless, there was an acceptance amongst my informants regarding what was taught in ZPS and how: the national curriculum coupled with Qur’an, Islamic Studies and Arabic, the latter three subjects grouped under the banner of an Islamic syllabus. There appeared either little or no scope or inclination to question what

could constitute the curriculum of a Muslim school and its means of delivery, although one suspects this might be no different to the state sector where junior staff have little input or control over curriculum. For my own part, I can see how ethos and curriculum are intuitive components of the Muslim school, but what they are or should be is a discussion beyond the constraints of this particular PhD thesis.

Parent-Governor Sami's claims of an Islamicised curriculum in Zamzam Primary's past, coupled with Rumaysah's suggestion that the school had been more religious in its early days, proved especially fascinating. Whilst this study focuses on but a small window of the Zamzam Primary's history, I, as a long-standing employee of the school, cannot neglect my own emic view. During my seven years as a teacher at ZPS, I had certainly seen aspects of school life change at the actual level. For example, an increasing professionalisation of teaching manifest in the micro day-to-day routines and practices at the actual level, that would support the theory of institutional isomorphism as being applicable at this study site. A "performativity culture" had become increasingly pronounced in Zamzam Primary, with the following but a few examples: the decision made by governors to enter ZPS pupils into SATs examinations; the tracking of attainment using "Insight Tracker" assessment analysis software; as well as the introduction of biannual performance management meetings for teaching staff, all of which were absent when my employment commenced in 2010. Whether the introduction and overseeing of increasingly professional standards, policies and procedures bringing Zamzam Primary more in line with mainstream schools, had coincided with and even contributed to a decrease in authentic religious observance, was a point open to debate.

Returning to a question posed in my literature review: which individual or authority can determine the orthodoxy, authenticity and ultimately effectiveness of a Muslim school: parents and pupils, teachers and governors, imams or inspectors? Perhaps one cannot enquire not whether a particular Muslim school is authentically Islamic, but rather, what is intended by the word "authentic"? I am unconvinced I can answer that question in any one of my multiplicity of roles: postgraduate researcher, ZPS employee and member of the faithful. Nevertheless, I can see how a number of my

teaching participants perceived that changes in religious rules, rituals and routines were resulting in a diminished institutional piety at Zamzam Primary. For example, the lunchtime duhr prayer had traditionally been performed in congregation with the QIC community in the mosque prayer hall (open to the public from midday). However, since 2014 it was done so in school, largely to appease Ofsted concerns around safeguarding of pupils when interacting with members of the public in the QIC prayer hall. Gender separation had also been more pronounced in the school's early years, with older boys and girls sat separately in class and playing amongst themselves, whereas this had become more relaxed in recent times. The school had also recently introduced a more rigorous delivery and assessment of art, with a member of the governing body assigned to monitor performance whilst music lessons (involving drumming and singing) were planned for the 2017/18 academic year – subjects that the Qur'an teacher ("art, music, dance") had claimed were conspicuous by their absence. In addition, staff had received external training on the 2010 Equality Act protected characteristics (including homosexuality and gender reassignment) so that PSHE lessons could be delivered more confidently and in accordance with Ofsted expectations. As noted, some of these changes were in direct response to Ofsted inspections – a downward normative cause I was cognisant of as an employee of the school - whilst others had evolved over time, the causal mechanism being somewhat more nebulous and elusive. With this in mind, I would align my own view with those participants who felt there was little difference between state schools and Zamzam Primary other than an "Islamic effect" (Panjwani, 2009).

Another issue in which I agreed with teaching participants of a "scorner" persuasion (and in doing so, I position myself here as one of their ilk as opposed to being a "true believer") was in questioning and subsequently dismissing the notion of Zamzam Primary as an innocence preserving bubble. As noted in my 2013 Masters dissertation, I found ZPS pupils to be highly versant in popular culture and little had changed at the time of this study. The consumption of arts, entertainment and media such as Disney and Netflix that was imported by children into the school space (as reported by the likes of Rumaysah and Sumayah plus A'rfa) was a phenomenon I had encountered as both employee and researcher. Whether this impinged upon an innate innocence (as understood by many informants) is harder to ascertain. During

inspections, Ofsted had noted the conduct of pupils was good and the school's behaviour management system effective in espousing, encouraging and rewarding values of respect, cooperation, reconciliation, hard work and community service – values my participants might claim were informed by an Islamic ethos, but also might be lauded in many communities and cultures, thus overlapping with much of the debated “British values.” Furthermore, at the actual level, I was cognisant of my own practice and that of my colleagues and our relationships with pupils and their conduct on a day-to-day basis. This then prompts the question whether parents were privy to the micro-interactions in the classroom that teachers and pupils reported during our interviews or were even concerned by them. If the “blocking” of external contagions (as participants understood them) was not taking place, then what were the myriad factors contributing to children's good behaviour in a school whose structures and practices differed little in many ways to its state counterparts?

Having explored the ideologies and discourses that underpin Muslim faith schools as well as the tensions that existed between government education policy and the conceptions of stakeholders in Muslim faith schools and Zamzam Primary specifically, I now present its teachers' motivations for entering the profession and their experiences of teaching in ZPS.

Chapter 6: The Teachers of Zamzam Primary School

6.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I will explore how teaching staff at Zamzam Primary perceived and experienced the role of the Muslim school in Queensbridge. In particular, I attempt to answer my research question (2.1) concerning why practitioners chose to work in a Muslim school when these institutions often have diminished financial incentives, career opportunities and inadequate resources (Zine, 2008 and Merry, 2011). To “break the ice” and to provide a context to the above issues and lines of enquiry that were identified in my research questions, I began my semi-structured interviews by asking participants, “Why did you choose to teach?” With Zamzam Primary School’s superdiverse body of staff comprised of individuals hailing from different age, ethnic, economic, educative and ecumenical³¹ backgrounds, answers inevitably varied. Nevertheless, a number of themes emerged as researcher and participant engaged in the meaning-making venture of generating data (Holstein and Gubrium, 1995 in Mann, 2011). Most salient amongst male participants was a shared story arc: a religious awakening of “pious self-formation” (Liberatore, 2013: 22) that inspired a greater appreciation of teaching and learning. Male and female participants also described their entry into education as being unintended or accidental, seeing this as a form of predestination and whilst circumstances in a Muslim school were challenging, the role was rewarding, even enjoyable. Finally, other factors cited by participants in their becoming teachers were the career opportunities the profession provided, plus an organic transition from the care of children to educating them.

³¹ From our discussions and my knowledge of them as colleagues, teaching participants generally followed a Salafi understanding of Islam although none explicitly described themselves as such. This might be anticipated by the fact that Queensbridge Islamic Centre is a Salafi mosque and, as an employer, would thus be more likely to attract employers following that particular understanding of Islam, albeit in varying degrees of rigour – as discussed throughout this thesis.

6.21 The Call to Teaching: Male Participants

Figure 8: Male Participants Discussing Teaching in ZPS

Name	Ethnicity	Age	Role	Years at ZPS
Abdur-Raheem	Spanish (Convert)	40s	Teacher and member of leadership team	2012- Present
			ZPS Parent	2013 - Present
Adil	Mauritian/ White British	20s	Trainee Teacher	2013
Amar	Bengali	20s	TA	2010-2011
			QIC admin	2014-Present
Dasham	Chinese (Convert)	30s	Governor	2010-2014
Hamud	Turkish	20s	TA & PE Teacher	2010-2013 2015-Present
			ZPS Parent	2013-2017
Mahmood	Somali	30s	Administrator	2010-2017
			ZPS Parent	2013 - 2017
Nadeem	Algerian	40s	KS2 TA	2015-16
Saluhideen	Bengali	20s	Governor	2012-2016
			QIC Madrassa Head	2012-Present
Sami	Algerian	40s	Governor	2005-2015
			ZPS Parent	2005-2015
Samir	Bengali	30s	Qur'an Teacher	2011-Present
			QIC Imam	2011-Present
			ZPS Parent	2013 - Present

A characteristic I found amongst both male and female members of the Queensbridge Muslim community was their valorisation of seeking and sharing knowledge, be it religious or secular at home or abroad. Saudi Arabia and Egypt were popular choices of destination for Queensbridge community members to learn more about their faith, at supposedly authentic Islamic institutions in Muslim majority nations. For example, teachers Adil and Sarah (as well as parent Connor) had all studied in Egypt. Saluhideen would acknowledge this veneration of learning in a brief remark about why he commuted from north London to work in Queensbridge: “Teaching: passing on knowledge. Erm, you know, it’s a very respectable role; it’s a very rewarding role.” Perhaps one of many causal factors for this exaltation of education amongst members of the Queensbridge community was their referral to Prophetic tradition. For example, amongst the many statements of the Prophet Muhammad (recorded in the Hadith collections) are expressions of admiration for those that study such as, “seeking knowledge is an obligation upon every Muslim” (Sunan Ibn Majah). As noted in chapter 4, Saluhideen would communicate in the voice of an ambassador presenting an official, even idealised position of a monolithic Islam and acting as an advocate for Queensbridge Islamic Centre. This extended to his exposition of “seeking knowledge”:

In Islam, when you have a particular knowledge is always encouraged to pass this on, especially good knowledge, erm, such as Qu- knowledge of, er, recitation of Qur’an. The Prophet (sala-), our Prophet, peace be upon him, he said, “The best of you is the one who learns the Qur’an and he teaches it” so, you know, it’s from that as a motivator.

(Interview with researcher, Zamzam Primary School, November 2015)

In the “moral economy” (Adelkhah & Keiko, 2011) of Queensbridge, predicated upon – in theory at least - Islamic values of equity, justice and goodness,³² “spiritual capital” (Berger & Hefner, 2003; Zohar & Marshall, 2004; Skousgard, 2007 and Baker & Smith, 2010) could be accrued by acquiring and disseminating authentic religious knowledge. For Saluhideen and many others in the Queensbridge community (and beyond) this would be exemplified in the teaching of the Qur’an. Spiritual capital is an adoption and adaptation of Bourdieu’s concept of capital, with

³² How “Islamic” this moral economy was in actual practice according to the perceptions of participants will be discussed throughout chapter 6.43.

Skousgard partitioning spiritual capital in three: embodied, objectified and institutionalised. The actor embodies spiritual capital when they have accumulated “knowledge, abilities, dispositions and tastes” (2007: 247). This capital is consequently objectified “in the material goods which carry symbolic value in the spiritual subculture” and is institutionalised “via the acquisition of qualifications from spiritual organizations” (ibid: 249). Therefore, Saluhideen’s exposition of memorising, reading and reciting the Qur’an might be seen as a form of knowledge and an example of embodied spiritual capital. Other scholars such as Rosowsky have positioned it as a “liturgical literacy” (2001) venerated by a “textual community” (Fox, 1994) - a group that define themselves “in relationship to a canon of scriptural texts, traditional reading and writing practices, and literacy values” (Elster, 2003: 669; see also: Marsden, 2011). Whether Qur’anic recitation can be constituted as a form of knowledge and specifically literary praxis has been addressed by other researchers and academics (including Wagner, 1998; Nelsen, 2001; Elster, 2003; Akkari, 2004; Gade, 2004; Moore, 2006, 2008 & 2012 and Boum, 2008). Consequently, “seeking knowledge” - be it through Qur’anic memorisation or otherwise - was not just a term used to depict everyday normative orthopraxis in the community, but also a virtuous lifestyle choice that was encouraged and deemed credible by many participants.

I now look at how a personal transformation amongst male teaching participants resulted in an increased commitment to “practising” Islam and influenced subsequent career choices. The first practitioner to share his experiences was Adil who completed his teacher training at Zamzam Primary, following his own religious awakening as a teenage. As an adolescent, Adil felt disengaged with formal education:

I had a very poor education: I left school at 15. You know, I had a teacher which really tried to help me through my issues at the time- in fact he allowed me, although I had left school for the term of my GCSEs, other teachers just not having it: you’re gone, your life’s over, xxx so I find that, you know, myself having a bad- not being the best behaved in class in the academic sense and I think that’s the thing with teacher standards is that it almost (pause) It doesn’t leave much scope for creativity or individualism for the teacher. A lot of it when we were taught how to teach, so to speak, was just this is how you do it.

(Interview with researcher, Zamzam Primary School, October 2015)

In his account, Adil questioned established methods of teaching and their lack of creativity in a way that some participants would, especially parent-governor Sami in his critique of Ofsted (see chapter 5.6). Adil's re-entry into education took place in the late 2000s and can be situated in the aforementioned religious milieu in which seeking knowledge was exalted:

Tom: What prompted your decision to choose a career in education?

Adil: Er, good question! A question I need to think about, actually! Er, I think it was a viable career, career path that would allow me to travel and er, explore other avenues. I would say that's the main reason really.

T: It's interesting you say a viable means to travel; could you expand upon that?

A: In terms of the demand for especially Western trained teachers, you know, is massive across the whole world - and someone who's travelled as myself living-lived in four different continents, you know, before the age of twenty one - it's something that would really allow me to achieve that.

(Interview with researcher, Zamzam Primary School, October 2015)

In his response, Adil described teaching as a means to an end (as opposed to the end) to accomplish other life goals. Not least of these was travel, a pastime Adil possessed a particular passion for, perhaps attributable to his living in "four different continents... before the age of twenty-one." Although Adil didn't express a desire to teach religion as Saluhideen (and later, Nadeem) would, he did want to teach in a "religious" environment, as evidenced in his subsequent tenure in an English language school in Saudi Arabia. This, however, proved to be short-lived. Adil returned to the UK following negative experiences in KSA pertaining to employment, housing and racism. Gaining CELTA certification was a popular means for male members of the Queensbridge community to seek employment abroad, the ultimate objective being to live in a Muslim country, especially Saudi Arabia (KSA). This "demand for especially Western trained teachers" in the likes of KSA could be interpreted by the critical realist ethnographer analysing deep structures and generative mechanisms to be partially a product - at the causal level - of processes of globalisation. Canagarajah's comments on added value are pertinent here as they can be applied to Adil's own life circumstances and professional development:

Another response to market saturation is to add value to the products. This calls for distinction (invoking Bourdieu's 1984 use of the term). Distinction can be provided by the claim that the product draws from a long local tradition that counters impersonal and generic production. As we know, if a product can claim authenticity as added value, it fares better in market competition.

(Canagarajah, 2016: 15)

Adil was able to “fare better in market competition” by retraining as an educator, adding value to his skills set and drawing distinction to himself as a professional on account of being a “Western trained teacher” drawing “from a long local tradition”, thus conveying “authenticity” to potential employers abroad. In conclusion, examining the evidence available, practicalities and pragmatism appear to be motivating factors for Adil's involvement with education as a profession as opposed to individual interest and enthusiasm or a commitment to “the mission” of teaching Islam.

Hamud had also experienced a similar disengagement to Adil with the mainstream British education system during his adolescence, although it had left a substantially significant impact in moulding his desire for career-orientated success:

That educational factor was always there, but it was never harnessed in such a way that – before, when I was in secondary school, you know, that was, that was not there because there was no respect for, like, scholarly works– respect for education, knowledge anything like that.

(Interview with researcher, Zamzam Primary School, October 2015)

Hamud's lament for his former lack of “respect for education” can be seen as a product of him being embedded within the contemporary Queensbridge culture of “seeking knowledge” and of him reproducing deeper religious ideological structures. Like Adil, Hamud became more observant of the Islamic tradition that was part of his family's Turkish heritage in his late teens. Where Adil differed perhaps, is that he was not raised explicitly as a Muslim, having been born into a household of mixed ethnicity and faith. Adil and his father both became “practising” Muslims at the same time in the late 2000s. Hamud was born into a Muslim family, but was less observant in his personal observance until his attitude to life (in general) and education (in particular) began to evolve:

So Islam, you know, it brought all of these things to surface, you know, I wholeheartedly embraced it and that was kind of the – that’s what started this whole venture.

(Interview with researcher, Zamzam Primary School, October 2015)

The main driver for Hamud’s reverence for education and an enhanced quality of life was his newfound religious observance, manifest as a “pious self-fashioning” (Liberatore, 2013: 28). Hamud began to extract practical benefits from religious rituals and would apply them in everyday situations:

I think that really was the catalyst for me when I started to practise, even just praying on time as well, praying five times a day, these sorts of things were- they were all good habits, they were all good habits, you know. The kind of habits that the professors and the scholars have: being punctual, doing your research, having that discretion, being able to think for yourself and being diligent, rigorous in the way you study and research.

(Interview with researcher, Zamzam Primary School, June 2015)

Here, Hamud identified not just a correlation between religious practice and academic excellence but causality; “praying five times a day” was the “catalyst” for being “rigorous in the way you study.” There thus appears a connection between Hamud becoming more “practising” and his increasing involvement with Queensbridge Islamic Centre, for example, his participating as player and then coach of the youth club football team. Hamud’s accomplishments in initiating a holiday scheme during the summer of 2010 led to his being “scouted” by Zamzam Primary’s Head and thus securing full-time employment that autumn. Hamud consequently enrolled in an access course to acquire the qualifications necessary to study at university (his studies beginning in 2013), an exemplification of the seeking knowledge culture identified earlier.

Saluhideen also described a journey from religious ignorance³³ to spiritual enlightenment. The journey undertaken by a number of male participants happened to be his journey:

³³ An admittedly powerful term I employ here on account of its prevalence amongst members of the Queensbridge community. Ignorance, or rather “jahiliya” was frequently used to describe a state of being before the observance of Islam amongst converts and newly practising Muslims. A historical precedent can be seen in the eighteenth century Islamic scholar Muhammad Abdul Wahhab’s “Aspects of the Days of Jahiliya” - his “Qitab al Tawheed,” a volume on Islamic creed, was also taught in a weekly class at QIC, a Salafi-inclined mosque.

Initially, I didn't know nothing about my faith although I was a born Muslim I didn't know nothing about my faith. I only knew the very basics, um, there was time I didn't know about praying five times was obligatory; didn't even understand it was obligatory. Erm, I couldn't read the Qur'an, there was a time in my life and even in my late teens I could not read Qur'an so it was a journey of discovery so it led me to interests in learning more about my faith.

(Interview with researcher, Zamzam Primary School, November 2015)

Saluhideen presented an intriguing juxtaposition of identity ('I was a born Muslim'), ownership ('my faith') and ignorance ('I didn't know nothing'). Whilst Saluhideen's Islam was inherited through family, he did not divulge what catalysed his own awakening. In this "process of self-making," Saluhideen seemed to be "distancing the self from the past" (Liberatore, 2013: 228) as evident in his remarks about "a time in my life and even in my late teens." Once he became "practising," Saluhideen – formerly an accountant - began to teach Qur'anic recitation to young people whilst volunteering at an international institute which delivered weekend seminars to students and professionals eager and willing to pay to study Islam. Increased observance of Islam might explain Saluhideen's use of "faith" as opposed to "religion" to describe a now more spiritually fulfilling practice. Regardless, Saluhideen understood teaching to be a natural extension of his religious duty to imbibe and impart knowledge, seen earlier in his comments concerning the "passing" on of Qur'anic recitation. Saluhideen's use of non-standard English, as evidenced in his repetition of the double negative "I didn't know nothing," perhaps indexed his social class. Moreover, his proclivity for invoking (divine) authority as an ambassador for Islamic orthodoxy was evident again when narrating how he had not intended to become a teacher, the causal mechanism for this "accident" in his world view being divine predestination:

Saluhideen: It's not something that I planned to go into.

Tom: Really?

S: Yeah. You know, as they say, sometimes you plan and then Allah plans and Qadr – destiny. I mean, initially I was training to be an accountant!

(Interview with researcher, Zamzam Primary School, November 2015)

In Evans's ethnography of a Jamaican High School, teachers provided numerous reasons for entering the profession including some participants asserting "it's something you fall into" (2006: 49). In expressing similar sentiments ("It's not

something that I planned to go into”), Saluhideen employed the Arabic term “Qadr” meaning predestination. Wilkinson explains Qadr, one of the six pillars of faith in Islamic theology,³⁴ as “every event and phenomenon in the world, both good and bad, happens as a result of the preordained will of the Creator” (2015: 107).

Saluhideen also articulated a popular idiom derived from the Qur’an: “you plan and Allah plans,” the causal mechanism presented here by my participant being less an actor’s own intentions, more the underlying force of Divine Will. For Saluhideen, his initial plans to become an accountant were overtaken by divine decree and he was subsequently guided into becoming an educator. Similar accounts of “God as the ultimate agent” in guiding participants to increased religious observance feature in Liberatore’s ethnography of female Somali Londoners (2013: 232).

Like Saluhideen, British-Bengali teaching assistant Amar would also attribute entry into education as an occurrence outside of his immediate control:

I did not want to become a teacher and I still don’t want to become a teacher! It really was a complete coincidence. By that point, erm, it was my youngest sister was a student at the school and my younger sister was a teaching assistant at the school and my dad heard a khutbah, a sermon, erm, talking about the school and how they’re looking for volunteers and he said to me, well, you’re not doing much right now, so help out. You know, at that stage of my life I was willing to volunteer, I was happy to put my time into stuff, so I thought, yeah, I’ll give it a go, not really knowing- not really knowing what I was getting myself into!

(Interview with researcher, Zamzam Primary School, July 2015)

Amar originally studied architecture at university and never planned to become an educator. In addition, it seems that after his experiences working with year 5 & 6 at Zamzam Primary, he would not want to pursue that particular vocation either; even so he went on to become an administrator and events manager for QIC.

Nevertheless, with a sister who had attended ZPS as a pupil between 2010-2012 (Fatima) and another working as a teaching assistant (A’rfa), Amar’s family were well acquainted with Zamzam Primary and this was a catalyst for his own involvement. Following encouragement from his father, Abu Fatima, who had heard a sermon in QIC espousing the merits of volunteering within the school community, Amar decided to volunteer “not really knowing” what he was getting into – perhaps

³⁴ The other pillars being: belief in God, the Messengers of God, divine scripture, angels and the afterlife.

on account of his relative youth and inexperience as an educator and even professional.

In closing, I have shown how Adil, Hamud and Saluhideen narrated a similar life trajectory. This personal transformation - as they viewed it - from ignorance to enlightenment, was rendered as a causal process for participants' entry into education. Amar, however, did not relay his life story (to that point) in the same detail as his colleagues but, like Saluhideen, suggested a causal mechanism beyond his control that led to him becoming an educator. For Saluhideen: Qadr, for Amar: coincidence, although if probed further this self-identifying "practising" and politically active Muslim (Amar was a member of the Muslim activist organisation MPACUK - Muslim Public Affairs Committee UK) would probably have explained it as divine providence. Nevertheless, my male participants presented teaching pragmatically: as a respected profession, a means to earning a living whilst accomplishing life goals but not quite a "call." I now turn to my female teaching participants to understand what drew them to the profession.

6.22 The Call to Teaching (Female Participants)

Figure 9: Female Participants Discussing Teaching in ZPS

Name	Ethnicity	Age	Role	Years at ZPS
A'rfa	British Bengali	20s	TA	2010-2014
Haniyah	Somali	Teens	TA	2013-2015
			QIC Madrassa Teacher	2015-Present
Maryam	British Pakistani	30s	Nursery nurse	2013
			Reception TA	2014 - Present
Rumaysah	Somali	20s	KS1 Teacher	2005-2015
Sabrina	British Nigerian (Convert)	30s	Nursery and Year 1 TA	2014-Present
Saffiyah	British Pakistani	Teens	Nursery Nurse	2015
Sarah	Eritrean	20s	KS2 Teacher	2011
			QIC Madrassa Teacher	2013 – 2015
Sumayah	British Somali	20s	KS1 Teacher	2014-2015
Vanessa	Turkish/White British	20s	ASC Coordinator	2012- 2013
			Canteen Manager	2015- 2016
			ZPS Parent	2013- 2016
Zara	Somali	30s	KS1 Teacher	2015-Present

In this section, I explore the call to teaching from the perspective of female participants, finding their motivations and narratives noticeably different from the majority, but not all, of their male counterparts. Many informants described a love of children as a driving force in their desire to teach as well as their own experiences raising children. This emotional investment in the next generation was not explicitly raised by male participants - although it does not necessarily follow that this was not a psychological driver felt at a causal level. Nevertheless, I start with a similarity: Sabrina suggested she stumbled into schooling like Saluhideen and Amar:

I was working in a school as an administrator anyway. There was a visit to an up and coming schools so you got a chance to see what pushed them every single day to become a teacher because it wasn't easy, especially when it's a new school and, um, you would come across a lot of people who are xxx and then I thought, hmm, I can do this! Once, a teacher came a little bit late so I just had to calm the class down but I quite enjoyed it, you know, that- and then I thought, If I'm thinking about a career what would I go for and I said I want something I can do and learn all my life and it was definitely teaching so that was it really.

(Interview with researcher, Zamzam Primary School, December 2015)

A sense of inevitability emerges in Sabrina's account ("I was working in a school as an administrator anyway") but without it being explicitly articulated as predestination and whilst both genders talked of the benefits of teaching - be they worldly or otherwise - personal pleasure did not feature at all in male accounts. Sabrina, however, presented individual satisfaction as being both cause and consequence of teaching:

Alhamdulillah, a job came up which was actually, um, working for the madrassa – which is an Islamic school teaching the Qur'an etcetera – and I was studying, um, Qur'an at the same time so I got a chance to apply all these new rules and to teach the children and I really, really enjoyed it.

(Interview with researcher, Zamzam Primary School, December 2015)

In the discussion above, Sabrina references the QIC Madrassa managed by Saluhideen and where Sabrina, Adil and Sarah had taught at various stages of their respective careers. Sabrina again positioned factors for her entry into education as external ("I got a chance") whilst also emphasising individual agency in her life trajectory:

So I now know I want to be a teacher, okay, but I don't know- I hadn't decided how I'm going to go about being a teacher but I know I want to be a teacher and- and so, alhamdulillah, I got married and moved to Queensbridge and erm, you know, I made lots of dua and- show me the steps and I was reading a Tony Robbins course and the Brian Tracey course and they said you need to have an end goal and work towards it and I said what do I need in order to be a teacher and you need, at least, experience.

(Interview with researcher, Zamzam Primary School, December 2015)

Here, Sabrina switches from personal desire ("I know I want to be a teacher"; "what do I need in order to be a teacher") to action ("I made lots of dua ") invoking divine guidance ("show me the steps"). For this participant, the process of becoming a teacher was portrayed as a product of human agency with divine support. Moreover, that very same human agency appeared to be catalysed or at least influenced by

Sabrina's reading material ("I was reading a Tony Robbins course and the Brian Tracey course") advocating a neoliberal concept of "self-care."³⁵ Similarly, in her ethnography of ethical change amongst young Somali women in London, Liberatore highlights the popularity of transformative courses, books and blogs amongst her religiously observant Muslim participants (2013). Returning to Sabrina, she would visualise "an end goal and work towards it" by accumulating teaching experience thus "adding value" to her skills set as a potential employee so that she may "provide for her own needs and service her own ambitions" (to paraphrase Brown, 2006: 694). In this extract, Sabrina - like Hamud and Adil before her – intertwined, at the empirical level at least, neoliberal ideas and key words with Islam, in a way that (again) appeared very natural and negotiable. As Panjwani notes, whilst Islam's anti-individualistic, anti-materialistic message could be undermined by such an approach (2012a and 2012b) here it seemed to have been or adapted to fit the requirements of living a modern urban lifestyle. This third way might have been a purposefully constructed chimera or an unintentional reflection of participants' thought processes, shaped by their traversing a neoliberal non-place (Routledge, 2007: 334). The generative mechanism for such reflections in the empirical domain being emotional, psychological, or structural was thus less singular and certain.

An interesting feature to emerge from the data was that Sabrina, like many members of staff at ZPS did not actually hail from Queensbridge. Whilst marriage prompted Sabrina's move to live amidst a Muslim community in south London, other members of staff commuted to work in an environment that was "Islamic", such as Zara, Saffiyah and, as established previously, Saluhideen. One of their commuting colleagues was Maryam who resided in a nearby area of south London and had earlier expressed her disdain for Queensbridge (chapter 4). From our conversations, it became quickly apparent that Maryam was a "scorner" in the mould of some of Peshkin's informants at Bethany Baptist Academy (1986). Just as these scorners questioned institutional ideology and practice in their setting, Maryam did not invest entirely in the Zamzam mission of Islamic education, unlike Sabrina, Saluhideen, Nadeem and Samir. However, what she did share with Saluhideen, Amar and (to a

³⁵ Neoliberal hegemony that leads to the dismantling of welfare programmes resulting in less social protection for citizens (George, 1999; Giroux, 2002; Jessop, 2002; Brown, 2006 and Harvey, 2007) can result in their need for "self-care."

lesser extent) Sabrina, was an initial ambivalence for teaching as a profession, with life circumstances propelling her towards it:

Maryam: To be honest, I kind of didn't plan on doing it.

Tom: Really?

M: Yeah, it kind of just happened. I- shall I go into like every...?

T: Yeah.

M: OK so I married young, left uni after two years and then I just couldn't stay home, couldn't do it so eventually, ah, my ex-husband agreed for me to work which was in an Islamic school cause that was the only thing that was suitable to him. Anyhow, I didn't realise how much I was going to like it.

(Interview with researcher, Zamzam Primary School, December 2015)

In this instance, the underlying processes informing Maryam's entry into education were both personal and structural, albeit articulated in a way that "othered agency" – Maryam's ex-husband exerting control over which professions were deemed suitable for her participation. Nevertheless, working in a Muslim school enabled Maryam to pursue a "halal" career whilst maintaining or rather, conforming to her particular marital dynamic (see also Inge, 2016b³⁶). By the end of extract, the personal was foregrounded with an emphasis on enjoyment: "I didn't realise how much I was going to like it". The "enjoyment factor" as a motivating factor for teaching was expressed by a number of female participants in my study as a reason why they not only entered the Islamic education sector, but also stayed in it, despite its drawbacks. For example, Zara's: "I just discovered that I loved teaching"; A'rfa's: "I started to grow a passion for it"; Sabrina's: "I really, really enjoyed it" or Saffiyah's: "I love working with children" were indicative of individual enjoyment being a driver to teach. With Muslim schools offering rudimentary returns for practitioners, be it limited career progression or financial reward (Breen, 2009 and Merry, 2010); one reason to remain in the profession was this element of enjoyment. Examples can be found in an extended exchange between Rumaysah and Sumayah; the discussion begins following musings over the similarities and differences between state and

³⁶ "Like many other British women, the Salafis had educational and professional aspirations, and were unwilling to make major compromises. Rather than give up on a career entirely, they chose degrees and jobs that were less likely to involve men, such as midwifery and primary-school teaching. They also did their best to select partners who'd support their career ambitions" (Inge, 2016b).

faith schools (Rumaysah: “I would say Muslim schools are the same as state schools”) and lamenting children’s failure to engage with Qur’an lessons:

Tom: With that healthy scepticism you have why would one continue to work in a Muslim school?

Sumayah: Hm. (Long pause.)

Rumaysah: I think it’s enjoyment of what you do.

S: Hm.

R: And liking the kids.

S: Definitely.

R: Not necessarily the adults. I would say the kids.

T: So why not go and work in a state school?

R: I don’t think I’d find the personalities here. I actually think there’s-

S: Satisfying.

R: We have quirky kids in Key Stage One. I don’t think we have one normal one!

S: There isn’t the same level of satisfaction. For example, when I was in state school you’d go in and come out and the kids were just kids, I saw them as work. It’s bad to say but it’s true; they were just a job whereas here I feel more, I dunno-

R: You feel more attached to the kids.

S: Yes. You care more for their education, you care more about their families even, um, or their home situations whereas in a state school it wasn’t- I didn’t feel...

R: You feel very invested in these kids.

(Interview with researcher, Zamzam Primary School, July 2015)

Whilst Rumaysah and Sumayah used verbs such as “care,” “satisfaction,” “enjoyment,” “invested” and “liking” to explain their involvement in education, they did not explicitly refer to a personal investment in imparting Islam to Muslim children, although that might have been inferred by their working – at the time of interview – in a Muslim school. In contrast, whilst male practitioners did not use emotive language that focused on enjoyment or feelings to explain their reasons for working in a Muslim school, many did express a commitment to the cause of Islamic education (for example, Saluhideen, Samir, Abdur-Raheem and Nadeem). This binary might invoke an oversimplified and essentialised image of “emotional

women” and “rational men”; British-Bengali TA A’rfa, however, seemingly occupied a position whereby both sentiments were reconcilable and articulated as such:

At first I was kind of hesitant, which is why I started doing voluntary work because I started work experience from 16 in a primary school and I quite enjoyed it so I thought maybe do it as a long term thing after I finish A-Levels. Then I found out I enjoyed- I started to grow a passion for it so I did voluntary work because it was seeing the children learn and having an impact upon their learning and seeing them love to learn.

(Skype interview with researcher, researcher’s home, February 2016)

Like Rumaysah and Sumayah, A’rfa expressed an enthusiasm for children’s growth in more emotive terms (“seeing them love to learn”) whilst also expressing a commitment to an educative mission (“having an impact upon their learning”).

Sarah articulated very different experiences to her colleagues. Born in Saudi Arabia to Eritrean parents and having described herself as always religiously observant (unlike Adil, Hamud and Saluhideen), it was a natural transition for Sarah to evolve from student to teacher at a young age:

As soon as I was 17 I became a teacher in a mosque, a TA, then I became a teacher and then I became a youth worker then I went to Egypt to study Arabic and while I was there, Alhamdulillah, I got a great opportunity to teach Science, Maths, English to kindergarten at that level and what have you.

(Interview with researcher, Zamzam Primary School, July 2015)

As noted earlier, Sarah’s travels to Egypt to improve her Arabic were very much typical of the Queensbridge climate in which seeking knowledge was venerated and studying abroad encouraged. Nevertheless, Sarah would describe teaching as her “calling”, having been inspired by an influential mentor:

It was my English teacher. I struggled in many areas but one thing I held onto was my reading because but I had a TA from a young age and to have that 1:1 support was amazing! To have that attention and to be made to that feel you can do this and there’s nothing wrong with you. That did a lot. I’m completely indebted to her. From that day, I was like: I want to help people because I was young that time. And I was like: Wow! This calling fell on my lap because of that one-

(Interview with researcher, Zamzam Primary School, July 2015)

In her final (incomplete) remark, Sarah acknowledged an external agency that signposted her calling: the presence of an inspiring educator in her life from a young age. In this instance, individual agency catalysed by interaction with an influential elder could be presented as the driver for entry into the profession. Like Maryam, this “othered” agency was not attributed to the divine, but were I to explore further, one suspects I would probably have unearthed a more explicit reference to predestination as a causal mechanism, according to this religiously observant Muslim, regarding how “this calling <that> fell on <her> lap.”

A final factor that influenced teachers’ decision to enter the profession was their own experiences of child rearing or supporting family members in the care of minors.

Somalia-born Zara shares her own experiences below:

When my children were growing up my- my oldest daughter, when she was about four years old, I had to help her. I had to teach her the numbers, the letters and I just got involved like that so I used to teach her and then I knew that- I don’t know, I just discovered that I loved teaching and then I tutored my nieces and my, you know, my nephews and then I tutored other people and then, I don’t know, that’s how it started.

(Interview with researcher, Zamzam Primary School, October 2015)

Like Saluhideen, Amar, Sabrina and Maryam before her, Zara also suggested a certain stumbling into schooling remarking: “I just discovered that I loved teaching.” Throughout the interviews one could discern a sense of inevitability in participants being drawn to their role of educators. One can also identify similar inexorability in Safiyyah’s comments below, although my style of questioning (“Have you always had that passion...”) could possibly have primed her answer:

Tom: Have you always had that passion for working with children and young people?

Saffiyah: I have.

T: Really?

S: I have, yeah. Growing up with a lot of young children around me anyway.

(Interview with researcher, Zamzam Primary School, November 2015)

In this chapter, I have sought to answer research question 2.1 by sharing some of the myriad reasons that members of staff at Zamzam Primary School and the

Queensbridge Islamic Centre entered teaching, reflecting the diversity of the team. These included awakening religiosity, altruism, a love of children, a pragmatic professionalism in which teaching was seen as a means to remuneration, as well as the mission of imparting Islam to the next generation of Muslims. Gendered differences were noticeable too, from a more emotional investment amongst female participants to a pragmatic professionalism amongst men. My own position regarding participants' views as a researcher is inevitably shaped by my own experiences as a male employee at ZPS. Whilst reluctant to propagate gender stereotypes, I am satisfied that there is some truth to the claims of my female teaching participants. This does not preclude the possibility of positive emotions being a causal mechanism for male educators to enter teaching, or arising as a response to their job. Nevertheless, altruism and affection as causes and/or products of teaching appeared to be absent in the data generated in discussion with male informants. Whether this phenomenon solely occurred at the empirical level or at the actual level is harder to discern, a set of circumstances compounded by underlying processes that could be nature, nurture or combinations of the two. A number of informants of both genders also suggested they stumbled into the profession or were guided, thereby othering agency in a manner Peshkin observed amongst his Christian educators: "some teachers enter their profession and learn only after the fact it was God's will for them that they teach" (1986: 64). In this manner, informants identified a causal mechanism outside of their own agency, namely divine ordinance, that precipitated decisions made and events occurring at the actual level. Perhaps the most interesting theme to emerge from the interviews was an amalgamation of elements of neoliberal ideology and expression (for example, an advocacy of "self-care" – at a superficial level at least) with the orthopraxy of religious conservatism, that was both natural and negotiable to participants, especially in their understanding of career-based success. However, whilst this manifested in the empirical domain as part of discussions with informants, it is much hard to ascertain how pronounced and meaningful it really was in the actual level and what the causal mechanisms for it were.

6.3 The Advantages of Teaching in Zamzam Primary

Having discussed informants' reasons for entering the profession, I now explore what life was like as an educator in Zamzam Primary, eliciting individual experiences and opinions from participants concerning the advantages and disadvantages of working in the organisation. In this way, I address a number of my research questions, including the first (What are the perceptions of teachers, parents and past pupils regarding the role and purpose of a Muslim faith school in the London borough of Queensbridge?) with both of its sub-questions alongside question 2.1: Why do teachers choose to work in a Muslim school? I start with the advantages, addressing four main themes, including the idea of the school being a spiritual sanctuary; in this moral economy believers could easily practise their religion and avoid practices that contradicted or violated their beliefs. This orthopraxy manifested most prominently in the ability to offer prayers in congregation, but also extended to the freedom to choose what clothing to wear and language to use. In exploring these deep structures and underlying processes for events that occur at the actual level (and documented at the empirical level within the accounts of my participants), I continue to employ Vincent & Wapshott's (2014) four quadrant matrix to classify and understand upwards and downwards normative and configurational causal mechanisms in unpacking, arranging and interpreting employees' accounts of life in Zamzam Primary.

6.3.1 A Moral Economy

The moral economy of Zamzam Primary School itself proved attractive to participants, its institutional edifice underpinned by an explicitly religious ethos discernable in environment and ambience. Whilst some scepticism has been expressed by scholars concerning how meaningful the "Islamic effect" in some Muslim institutions actually is (Panjwani, 2009), the sanctity of the space was important, pronounced and plausible for Samir:

One thing you find absent here is what is contradictory with the faith - is totally absent here. There might be something that's not totally promoting the faith but there's nothing that could contradict the faith.

(Interview with researcher, Zamzam Primary School, October 2015)

As highlighted previously, Qur'an teacher and imam Samir was very much a true believer in the mission of Zamzam Primary and Queensbridge Islamic Centre as a whole. Despite the absolute nature of his assertion that elements contradictory to Islam were "totally absent here", Samir identified a pull factor - real or imagined - that would attract practitioners to work in a Muslim school and Zamzam Primary specifically: a halal environment. "Those sort of things" found in "mainstream society" such as "art, dance, music" that might contradict one's Islam were not present in Zamzam Primary, in Samir's estimation at least. As has been seen earlier, other participants such as Rumaysah and Sumayah (in chapter 5. 5) would go on to agree that such taboos were not necessarily taught in the school to any great degree; however, popular culture was certainly acknowledged, understood and enjoyed by a number of pupils and even some adults, albeit generally consumed outside Zamzam Primary and Queensbridge Islamic Centre.

In Zine's study on Muslim schools in Canada, teaching participants noted that these sites were "spaces of solidarity and community for Muslims... fostering greater cohesion on the basis of a common Islamic identity" (2008b: 106). Similarly, a number of my informants expressed enthusiasm that Zamzam Primary was a space in which Islamic identity; allegiance and unanimity were overt, embedded and enacted:

Sabrina: You're working amongst other Muslims.

(Interview with researcher, Zamzam Primary School, December 2015)

A'rfa: I felt more comfortable because even though it's really diverse there's a chance I wouldn't be able to make- it's the faith that makes me fit in better, I think.

(Skype Interview with researcher, family home, February 2016)

Sarah: I found great colleagues. Oh gosh, yeah, loved it. I loved the collaboration, the – what's it called – the experience they brought; their practices; their theories; their up-to-date knowledge on education systems and anything to do with education, pedagogy, practices and what have you. That was amazing; I felt like I was having mentors.

(Interview with researcher, Zamzam Primary School, July 2015)

Both Sabrina ("You're working amongst other Muslims") and A'rfa identified the sense of belonging ("it's the faith that makes me fit in") and familiarity ("I felt more comfortable") they felt in becoming a member of a close-knit yet ethnically

superdiverse school community, anchored in the Islamic faith. Sarah would express similar sentiments but in the language of the professional (“I found great colleagues”), in a manner not too dissimilar to Hamud, Adil and Sabrina’s earlier reflections on career orientated success. Unlike her colleagues’ focus on communality and belonging, Sarah would address individual career development concerning “practices” and “theories”, facilitated by experienced and expert support (“I felt like I was having mentors”). Conversely, A’rfa would later concede that traversing a social domain bonded together by dense network ties would present its own set of problems (chapter 6.44), whilst other teachers would question how pronounced the camaraderie between colleagues actually was, whilst critiquing the inadequacy of support networks for staff (chapter 6.42).

Nadeem would also testify to a positive atmosphere of conviviality and collaboration in which shared religious identity was complimented by a uniformity of mission:

The parents are helping and the teachers are helping there is a very, very, er, communication- good communication skills and most of the teachers they got one goal.

(Interview with researcher, Zamzam Primary School, October 2015)

Algerian-born Nadeem presents a somewhat utopic vision of Zamzam Primary that his fellow true believers would probably agree with; a similar “unity between staff” and “sense of purpose” and “common goal” was identified in Breen’s study of “Medina School” (2009: 61). For Nadeem and other participants, Zamzam Primary possessed a clear mission statement that informed an overt - although not necessarily all pervasive - Islamic ambience, and a sense of unison amongst the school community of pupils, teachers and parents. I interpret these as upwards normative causes for a solidarity that strengthened the superstructure as a whole, although other participants would disagree with Nadeem in chapter 6.43. Regardless, of these pull factors to work in a Muslim school one was especially alluring – being able to perform congregational prayer.

6.32 Prayer

The most obvious religious ritual in Zamzam Primary's moral economy was prayer. The school day began at 7:45 a.m. when parents dropped off their children in the men's prayer hall of Queensbridge Islamic Centre, which also functioned as the school's assembly hall. Children sat in their year group lines, boys in the front and girls in the back. This practice was adhered to in assembly perhaps because pupils convened in the mosque itself, where genders were separated for worship (although this practice would eventually be overhauled at the start of the 2017/18 academic year). As children trickled in, pupils recited short chapters of the Qur'an in unison with Samir. Either Samir or the Head - two of the only three members of staff fluent in the classical Arabic used in prayer, supplication and Qur'anic recitation, the other being the school's Arabic teacher - then lead pupils in morning supplications. Next, the Head would deliver a short religious reminder before teachers collected their respective year-groups, escorting them to class for registration and lessons. At lunchtime, teachers and children performed the duhr prayer, the timing of which was contingent upon the seasons: in winter, when prayers were more tightly condensed due to the shortness of the daylight hours, duhr took place at the beginning of lunch-break, whereas in autumn and summer terms it occurred at the end. During the winter months, asr prayer was also performed in the middle of the afternoon, necessitating changes to lesson timetabling, a restructuring of the school day also found in Breen's Muslim "School A" and Medina Primary (2009). In this way, the performance of prayer (or assembly) as a communal and routine "macroritual involving the total school society" (Erickson, 1984: 55) could be understood to be an upwards normative cause contributing to an institutional image and atmosphere of religiosity, projected outwardly to the public. However, the embeddedness of this ritual in daily operational procedure, as determined by management in their policy planning, could also be interpreted as a downwards configurational cause for the school's make up. During interviews, participants expressed their approval and appreciation at being afforded the opportunity to offer prayer without obstruction or objection - as might be the case in the mainstream workplace - and in congregation:

Saffiyah: I'm able to pray whenever I need. I'm not- no one can say to me, you know, you can't pray.

(Interview with researcher, Zamzam Primary School, November 2015)

Maryam: You can pray freely, er, when you need to; you have enough time to do so – pray.

(Interview with researcher, Zamzam Primary School, October 2015)

Sabrina: That freedom to pray your salah and it's accepted, you know, it's not taken from you in your lunch break or anything like that, yeah

(Interview with researcher, Zamzam Primary School, December 2015)

Saffiyah, Maryam and Sabrina echoed each other with their use of “freely,” “able” and “freedom” in referring to the Muslim school as a space distinct from presumably secular settings wherein the performance of prayer might be embarrassing, inappropriate or not accommodated. Were one to contextualise these comments, the rhetoric employed incorporates a particular aspect of the libertarian ideology according to Haidt:

Libertarians care about liberty almost to the exclusion of all other concerns, and their conception of liberty is the same as that of Republicans; it is the right to be left alone, free from government interference.

(Haidt, 2012: 212)

At this juncture it might be prudent to revisit Haidt's typology that will feature more prominently henceforth. Whilst the liberal's moral matrix is predicated upon three points: i. care/harm, ii. liberty/oppression; iii. fairness/cheating, the conservative moral matrix incorporates the aforementioned three anchors as well as: iv. loyalty/betrayal; v. authority/subversion; vi. sanctity/degradation. Libertarians also employ a six point moral matrix, but prioritise individual liberty. When analysing my participants' use of the language of the libertarian, one might ask whether this was: a considered choice; a reflection or reproduction of the underlying economic, political and cultural norms and structures of the “Neoliberal Non-Place” they lived and worked in; or a projection of my cultural schema and subjectivities onto them. And whilst some commentators have identified libertarian aspects amongst Islamic nations throughout history (Hanson, 2010), it would be somewhat presumptive to precisely position informants' personal politics on a conservative-liberal-libertarian scale with any form of confidence or authority. Nevertheless, I suspect most of my participants would be deemed to possess socially conservative values and lifestyles when viewed through the lens of the liberal's 3-point matrix.

Moving on, when dissecting the data, it does appear that the aspect of libertarianism Saffiyah, Maryam and Sabrina either deliberately or inadvertently evoke is one of choice, pertaining not to economics (i.e. the deregulation of state control over major industries or the elimination of trade barriers) but ethics. Granted, for Haidt's archetypal libertarian, economics may well entail ethical issues, but my analysis here is more linguistic. For the purposes of this study, I have adopted Haidt's typology and adapted his definition of libertarianism (with its prioritisation of the liberty marker on a moral matrix) to understand how the practising Muslim in a western secular nation might define religious liberty: "the right to be left alone to practise one's faith, free from government - and by extension, employer - interference." For my teaching participants, religion was intertwined with rights. Moreover, the concept of personal choice would reoccur in discussions with teaching participants about language and clothing, whilst religious freedom appeared prominently when addressing the Ofsted agenda (see chapter 5.6). To reiterate, I do not interpret these appeals to "liberty" as definitive markers of individual conservative-liberal-libertarian political preferences, especially as this particular value is found in all three of Haidt's models. Rather, I see it as an indicator of a desire for the protection and application of individual rights as employees belonging to a minority religious (and ethnic) group(s), in a secular society whose normative practices inform professional life in even religious workplaces.

Returning to prayer specifically, Maryam hinted that the freedom to perform salah in Zamzam Primary pertained to time; daily worship did not encroach upon teaching or non-contact hours used for marking and lesson planning. Zara would expand in more detail, drawing a comparison between the culture of Zamzam Primary and her experiences in the mainstream sector:

I love working here and I feel comfortable because I can pray my salats on time because when I was working in the state school I never used to pray asr. Wintertime, you miss asr. By the time I get home it's Maghrib. And you feel awkward, you can't say - cause you already pray duhr - you can't say I wanna go asr too cause you disrupting the lesson. In a way I feel guilty all the time because I'm like, oh my goodness, I'm not praying my salats on time, which is the reason why I came here.
(Interview with researcher, Zamzam Primary School, October 2015)

Zara's religious requirements, or even rights, were not accommodated in her former place of employment, a secular space, on account of timetabling constraints. Moreover, Zara felt uncomfortable importing or imposing her private and personal religious orthopraxy into the public workplace, especially to the inconvenience of others ("you can't say I wanna go asr too 'cause you disrupting the lesson"). Further analysis of the language Zara used addressing prayer reveals a focus on feelings attached to its performance (or lack of) from positive ("love" and "comfortable") to negative ("awkward" and "guilty"). As noted in chapter 6.12, female teachers employed more overtly emotive language during interviews than their male colleagues to explain their motivations for teaching, although this is not to understand participants' language as an essentialised gendered binary of sober male logic and erratic female irrationality. Nevertheless, the emergence of emotion at the empirical level as an explanation for events at the actual was an interesting occurrence and also featured in Sabrina's account. Here, she highlights a similar sense of "time-consciousness" pertaining to prayer in mainstream settings:

It's so precious when you're gonna pray because you know you've got a twenty minute lunch break and it has to cover your xxx and you're leaving from your desk or whatever, it is actually lost so you have to make sure you do your wudu on time and keep yourself conscious of the times of salah.

(Interview with researcher, Zamzam Primary School, December 2015)

For Sabrina, prayer was "precious" and purposeful as evidenced in her alertness ("keep yourself conscious of the times of salah"). Whilst refraining from the overtly emotive parlance of his colleagues in his depictions of prayer, Amar hinted at the ideal of liberty in religious affairs when musing on what made Zamzam Primary Islamic:

Well there's the allowance for the prayers; the day starts with an assembly and a dua, a prayer.

(Interview with researcher, Zamzam Primary School, July 2015)

The accommodation of observing prayer was integral in bestowing a religious character upon the school. Whilst Amar and his colleagues invoked liberty as a means to practise their faith, a question arises: how would staff be received by colleagues, children and community if they chose to opt out of congregational prayer in this socially conservative (evidenced, for example, by modest dress and reserved

gender interactions) and close-knit environment? One might speculate that the reaction would perhaps not be one of the liberal's indifference to a matter deemed to be a preserve of the private sphere alongside sex and drug use (Haidt, 2012; 350). Conversely, as self-identifying "practising" Muslims who made sacrifices (primarily financial) to work in a Muslim school so that their prayer may be prioritised, it was also highly unlikely that this would ever be the case.

As a postscript to this topic, two teachers, both converts, warned against complacency with regards to prayer. Firstly, I share the views of Spanish-born Abdur-Raheem as he expounded upon the benefits of working in a Muslim school:

The privilege of being here; people don't see it as a privilege because- also, a lot of teachers in Muslim schools don't seem to see it as a privilege more like, they're doing a favour, you know, they're struggling here, they don't really want to be here but they have to – or because they want to take some benefit but not necessarily-, you know, it might be I want to pray in jamat, I want to pray in congregation; there's way more benefit than that so this is mainly the reason why I work in Muslims schools, you know.

(Interview with researcher, Zamzam Primary School, June 2015)

Rallying against a sense of entitlement, Abdur-Raheem – whether intentionally, inadvertently or intuitively - disclosed how important prayer was to him (and one imagines many others) as an observant Muslim. The calculating practitioner in a Muslim school might capitalise on the opportunity to "pray in congregation" even though they "don't really want to be here", but they should be cognisant of the "privilege of being here." In this extract, as he would do elsewhere in our interview, Abdur-Raheem switched between his experiences in Zamzam Primary and Muslim schools generally, suggesting that circumstances in his current place of employment were perhaps not too dissimilar to the previous Islamic institutions he worked in. However, in the extract below, Sabrina muses how being cognisant of time constraints in a state setting could actually prompt increased observance of prayer:

The problem is that because you're in that environment you could get complacent so you have to be conscious that you could get complacent so I've had a taste of it even in non-Muslim environments you hold onto your Deen more because you know that you're the only one. Whereas when you're around the Muslims, you know the adhan's going to go when it's time for salah; you would have observed it more if you were- because you had to. There's Muslims there to tell you to, you know, take

a xxx, you do your wudu way in advance because no-one's going to give you that extra xxx for your salah, do you understand?

(Interview with researcher, Zamzam Primary School, December 2015)

As an integral part of one's religious observance, performance of prayer was the main way a Muslim could "hold onto your Deen more." Moreover, Abdur-Raheem and Sabrina might have been more attuned to this as converts to Islam possessing a greater zeal for the faith than others, although how this would be measured even at an empirical or actual level is unclear. Regardless, the ability to perform the prayer at its allotted times and in congregation proved to be a major pull factor to work in a Muslim school for my religiously observant informants.

6.33 Clothing

Whilst participants cited the other advantages to working in ZPS with considerably less frequency than environment and prayer, two other "pull factors" emerged: the freedom to wear modest clothing and employ overtly religious language. Situated in a conservative religious community, it was unsurprising that some participants would activate the option to adopt Islamic attire and see this as a positive of working in Zamzam Primary:

Maryam: You're free to dress Islamically, what you see Islamic.

(Interview with researcher, Zamzam Primary School, October 2015)

Saffiyah: I can dress how I feel like I need to dress, I want to dress; you know, there's no one to tell me I can't dress a certain way.

(Interview with researcher, Zamzam Primary School, November 2015)

In their choice of language, both Maryam ("You're free to dress Islamically") and Saffiyah ("there's no one to tell me I can't dress a certain way") again invoked the ideal of liberty, as they had when celebrating the freedom they were afforded in offering prayer. However, whilst the standard ZPS contract for employees did outline a dress code (no jeans for men, no make-up or high heels for women) it wasn't enforced; participants appeared to adhere to it of their own choosing albeit with a number of "violations" (for example, I observed Nadeem wearing jeans daily) and did not cite any specific objections to its prescriptiveness. One might also posit that only female participants raised the freedom to "dress Islamically" as advantageous, since standards of dress observed by conservatively inclined Muslims

were more explicit and exacting for women than men and had been internalised and enacted as such as part of their commitment to faith (see also Inge, 2016a). In addition, what dressing Islamically entailed was never specified by interviewees, perhaps because I would know as a coreligionist and colleague. Nevertheless, in Zamzam Primary, Muslim women were granted a freedom to regulate or even restrict their choices in clothing as they saw fit that perhaps they might not in a secular setting. The enactment of this allowance can be interpreted as an upwards normative cause in which the individual choices of employees regarding clothing contributed to an overtly religious atmosphere, especially visually. Simultaneously, its origins lay in institutional legislature that facilitated a certain degree of freedom for staff to wear what they wished and thus could simultaneously be seen as a downwards configurational cause for events at the actual level.

6.34 Language

In Martinez's study of Florida Islamic School the proliferation (and even encouragement) of Arabic terminology indicative of religious observance was a defining feature (2012) as was the case in Breen's Medina Primary (2009). Likewise, the allowance or option to use overt and explicitly religious (Arabic) terminology in Zamzam Primary was another factor that proved positive for Saffiyah:

I'm allowed to- well, not allowed to but obviously I can use words as in, you know, mashallah, alhamdulillah and it's not going to be weird to- If I'm working in a non- They're gonna be like: what's she saying kind of thing! Alhamdulillah.

(Interview with researcher, Zamzam Primary School, November 2015)

Saffiyah's self-correction of "I'm allowed to" is again suggestive of the liberty ideal that emerged in interviews with teaching staff. Moreover, outside of the safe-space of Zamzam Primary, one might be compelled to regulate the use of religious expression ("mashallah", "alhamdulillah") to adapt to the sociolinguistic norms of office culture. Saffiyah then concluded her reflections on a de facto embargo on Arabic terminology in mainstream spaces with a celebratory "alhamdulillah."

The use of palpably Islamic language was just one of the freedoms educators were afforded in the sanctuary of ZPS to express themselves in accordance with the norms of a conservative religious subculture. Coupled with choices of clothing and

observance of ritual and celebrations, these were pull factors for practitioners to specifically seek employment at Zamzam Primary (or another Muslim) School. This was articulated either knowingly or coincidentally in the parlance of libertarianism, albeit as a religious freedom or entitlement, without necessarily positioning participants' political or economic outlook as such. Unlike the drivers cited that attracted informants to the vocation of teaching itself, there was no mention of career opportunities, professional development, remuneration or investment in the mission. This might be because practitioners, once inside the field of Islamic education, encountered different ideas, enticements and experiences to those that initially attracted them to the job – a phenomenon prevalent in the mainstream sector as well (Weale, 2015). I now explore what those differences and disadvantages were.

6.4 The Disadvantages of Teaching in Zamzam Primary

Scholars have identified some of the disadvantages of working in Muslim schools (Mustafa, 1999; Hussain, 2004; Merry, 2005 & 2010; Parker-Jenkins, 2011; Zine, 2011). These include concerns about the quality of education, specifically: insufficient expertise amongst teachers, inadequate facilities, limited resources and unequal opportunities for girls (Mustafa, 1999 & Miah, 2015) With the above in mind, Merry's assessment of the state of Muslim schools in the United States appears equally applicable to those in the UK as this chapter will demonstrate:

Reports of inadequate administrative support, low pay, staff burnout and school board ineffectiveness are common, and teacher retention remains an ongoing challenge to Islamic schools... Moreover, independent Islamic schools face formidable financial problems...

(Merry, 2010: 28-29)

In this section, I focus on four main areas of difficulty encountered by practitioners at Zamzam Primary. I begin with an examination of the limited resources that impact deleteriously upon teaching and learning; I then explore the processes underlying these problems: disorganised management and an underdeveloped support structure for staff, that I position as a downwards configurational cause for events at the actual level. The next area of contention expressed by teaching participants is the disconnect between the ideal Muslim school and the reality of Zamzam Primary, with what they perceived as a failed fellowship and superficial spirituality that results in discontentment amongst a number of staff. I then analyse the obfuscation

of boundaries amongst professionals and parents in a close-knit faith community characterised by dense network ties.

6.41 Finance and Facilities

I began chapter 6.4 with Merry's description of the challenges facing Muslim schools in the United States and how they resonate with those in the UK, including Zamzam Primary. Merry identifies how "formidable financial problems" impact upon schools:

Very few Islamic schools, including those that are well established, are able to provide a school nurse, proper science lab facilities, social workers, music or fine art classes, special education services or guidance counselors. Most also do not have a library or extra-curricular activities.

(Merry, 2010: 28-29)

Martinez provides a specific example of the above when describing Florida Islamic School's "limited resources" (2012: 102), whilst Zine paints a similar picture of Muslim schools in Canada that are "operating without public funding and management, which leaves them under-resourced and unregulated" (2008a: 37). Observations concerning limited facilities and finances were also made by participants when reflecting upon the disadvantages of working in Zamzam Primary:

Vanessa: It being a small school, the facilities are not exactly to a high standard, as you would get in a state school.

(Interview with researcher, Zamzam Primary School, November 2015)

Nadeem: We don't have a lot of resources so this is my main concern on the disadvantages.

(Interview with researcher, Zamzam Primary School, October 2015)

Whilst Vanessa and Nadeem identified scant resources as being problematic, they did not specify how this impacted teaching and learning on a day-to-day basis. This might have been attributable to Vanessa's role as canteen manager (as opposed to class teacher) and Nadeem's relative newness to his role (he had only begun work at ZPS in September that year). Amar, however, was more specific:

It just felt like a struggle whether it was there were days when we ran out of paper to photocopy with so whether it was budgetary or managing the kids which I suppose is a manpower issue.

(Interview with researcher, Zamzam Primary School, July 2015)

Sarah would also share her concerns about Muslim schools in general, some of which overlapped with Amar's, for example, identifying budgetary constraints as impacting negatively upon recruitment – a problem that also afflicted Martinez's Florida Islamic School (2012):³⁷

Sarah: First, I really believe that every teacher needs to be qualified and I don't see that.

Tom: Is the absence of qualified teachers in Muslim schools because they don't want them or can't get them?

S: I think it's funding. When I mean funding I don't think they have the necessary money allowance to give the pay check that aligns with the teacher's qualifications and experiences and to answer your question: they don't want to? I would hope that they do.

(Interview with researcher, Zamzam Primary School, July 2015)

Sarah begins by expressing her belief in the importance of existing mainstream educational practice and procedure in a way that other participants would throughout interviews, (teacher Sumayyah and parents Marwa and Connor, for example): educators should be accredited before practising their profession ("every teacher needs to be qualified") although this wasn't the case in Muslim schools. Sarah's remarks can be understood to valorise a process of "normative isomorphism" that derives from professionalisation, which involves "the filtering of personnel in relation to skill level requirements for particular occupations" (DiMaggio and Powell, 1991: 71 in Breen, 2009: 25). Examining events at the actual level, Sarah would attribute a lack of funding for the absence of qualified teachers in Muslim schools, even though the intention to hire certified and experienced professionals should be present; managerial frugality understood to be a downwards configurational cause. Maryam would elucidate Sarah's points in greater detail with specific reference to Zamzam Primary, especially concerning the impact of a low budget upon recruitment and the consequences for existing staff members:

³⁷ A problem in the QIC madrassa as well, according to Adil here as he reflects upon his own experiences teaching Arabic: "Yeah, it was in, er, Young Muslim Academy based in Queensbridge, it's a typical Madrassa. You know, it's very rare to find qualified teachers, so simply, a lot of the time, you know it'll be someone xxx who'll have the knowledge- I'd definitely would say my teaching there wasn't any good whatsoever!"

Maryam: There's not enough staff members for the roles they want everyone to do; they'll have one person doing five people's jobs, that's where I think the mega issue is with this place.

Tom: What causes that?

M: Money. Can't afford to pay more members of staff. I think if you had a member of staff for- who can manage their role adequately and people were in charge of their- Nobody wants to be in charge of anything because everyone's already so bunged down with so much; I mean, no-one wants to be the SEN coordinator or this coordinator or that after school club! I don't want to do afterschool club; you know? I'm here from 7:30, 7:40 till 4 o' clock, 4:30, I'm not going to stay longer! Hire people. Employ people who are good at these things, who have passion for it. You'll have a better outcome than using one person to do five people's jobs!

(Interview with researcher, Zamzam Primary School, October 2015)

In her reflections, Maryam provided a brief sketch of employee dissatisfaction probably familiar to many teachers in state schools. She noted her long working hours ("I'm here from 7:30, 7:40 till 4 o' clock, 4:30"); the exhaustion endured by colleagues, ("everyone's already so bunged down with so much"); a reluctance to take ownership of tasks ("Nobody wants to be in charge of anything") and the apportioning of blame to an indistinct management ("they'll have one person doing five people's jobs") – the latter theme to be discussed in more detail shortly. Maryam also described the wrap-around care provided by Zamzam Primary, including its after school club and special educational needs provision, a common provision in state schools and suggestive perhaps, that Merry's assessment of Muslim schools in the USA cannot be applied wholesale in the case of a British Muslim school like ZPS. Whilst there might have been some dramatic exaggeration in Maryam's account at the empirical level ("they'll have one person doing five people's jobs") that diminishes its accuracy somewhat, the frustration expressed appears only too authentic a representation of events in the actual domain of reality.

Abdur-Raheem would also describe disorganisation afflicting the institution as attributable to a lack of experience and expertise at a managerial level, as opposed to scant resources or funding - a downwards configurational cause. He would, however, implicitly acknowledge limited finances as a mainstay of the Islamic educational landscape when describing his own experiences as a new convert working in Muslim

schools and not just an issue at Zamzam Primary.³⁸ The discussion begins having just heard Abdur-Raheem criticise Muslim schools that were established without a strong foundation and vision:

Tom: Is it because the people setting up the school don't have a background in education?

Abdur-Raheem: Yeah, yeah. It's because the money is within people who are not educated-

T: Hm, hm.

A: And instead of saying OK- it's like, I always compare it to, er, like, football, you know? 'Cause you've got the owners.

T: Yeah.

A: The owner doesn't necessarily know a lot about football but, you know, but he don't – he doesn't have to learn about football to understand all the people, who are all the adequate people for the job. All he needs to know is what's working, what's not and you don't get the owner of the team, who pays the bills, to coach the team – he doesn't know anything else.

T: Yeah.

A: And this is what's happening. You get these people – they have the money but because they have the money, they have the power or it is their right to make the decision and take this school forward and it's like, look, maybe you're just providing the money, that's all, but you're providing the money OK you provide the money but community provide the structure for it and the head, you know, so I think this is where a lot of the problems in a lot of the schools I've been in, you know. This is the main mistake with Muslim schools; this is the main thing they're stuck in.

(Interview with researcher, Zamzam Primary School, June 2015)

Employing a vivid football metaphor, Abdur-Raheem drew upon his years working in Muslim schools to describe a scenario encountered in many Islamic institutions. Unlike his colleagues, Abdur-Raheem suggested that there was money, but school governors lacked the requisite experience and expertise to manage it ("the money is within people who are not educated"). Abdur-Raheem also hinted at malpractice: governors enjoyed unchecked authority ("they have the power or it is their right to make the decision") as a consequence of their economic capital ("they have the

³⁸ Abdur-Raheem: "When I first came in it was more doing it for the sake of Allah, you know, for the sake of God and just whatever sacrifices I had to make it didn't matter. Money wasn't relevant or anything. I mean, I was working in state schools at the time so I was earning what normal state schoolteachers were earning but money wasn't an issue anyway."

money”), for the issues he witnessed during his career (“This is the main mistake with Muslim schools”). Zine identifies similar downwards configurational causes in the research of Parker-Jenkins and Haw (1996) who conducted an ethnographic study of six single-sex schools for Muslim girls in the UK:

The educational discourse, they argue, was marginalized by the patriarchal discourse because the school governors act as the decision-making body of the school despite having no background in education.

(Zine, 2008a: 40)

Having encountered such critiques of governors in the existing literature and from my participants, it is only fair to conclude with reflections from members of Zamzam Primary’s governing body. In doing so, I seek to establish whether their perspectives correlate with teachers’ own outlook. Parent-governor Sami would speak on the matter of Zamzam Primary’s facilities and equipment, empathising with teaching staff and commending their resourcefulness:

The resources are always very short, they just don’t have- Some of the teachers I’ve seen are very clever in the way they use what they have to make their lessons interesting but there’s so much you can do, you know, and you can’t stretch beyond your possibilities so they need to invest in that school.

(Interview with researcher, family home, October 2015)

Whilst Sami praised “the teachers” ingenuity, he employed an impersonal pronoun (“they”) in apportioning blame for institutional austerity. An analysis of the full transcript shows that Sami made it clear that, in his estimation, the reason for scant resourcing was a lack of investment on the part of QIC’s management committee. This apportioning of blame from one organisational department to another is reminiscent of a manager in Nichols and Beyon’s study of Chemco when reflecting upon responsibility for redundancies:

The thing is I don’t think they think it’s me. I don’t think they think it’s my boss. They think it’s “them”. But we’re “them”. But it’s not us. It’s something above us. Something up there.

(Nichols & Beyon, 1977: 41)

Sami description of tight budgeting can be interpreted as a downwards configurational cause, although one he was absolved of as a parent-governor and not one of “them” – QIC management (comprising the Imam, centre manager, finance department and management committee). This ascribing of responsibility - even

blame - to “something up there” also evoked Maryam’s earlier gripe that “they’ll have one person doing five people’s jobs” and Sarah’s observation that “I don’t think they have the necessary money allowance.”

Sami’s former-colleague on the board of governors, Saluhideen, also pinpointed Zamzam Primary’s limited spending power as being symptomatic of overall institutional austerity, a downwards configurational cause:

We are under-resourced as an Islamic centre; we need more resources, I would say but you know, that- that’s not a major issue. Inshallah, over time we- we will improve and, you know, we have hope that we will grow and we’ll have more of the resources we need inshallah.

(Interview with researcher, Zamzam Primary School, November 2015)

Where Saluhideen differed from Sami was his use of “we” as opposed to “they.” This expression of solidarity might be attributable to the fact that Saluhideen was a paid employee of QIC at the time of interview whereas Sami, an admired and influential member of the school community, had never actually worked for QIC in a paid capacity. Furthermore, as noted previously, Sami had actually severed ties altogether with both Zamzam Primary and Queensbridge Islamic Centre, his emotional fatigue evident throughout our discussions. Saluhideen, however, was very much still invested in the mission, foregrounding collective endurance over individual responsibility; ever the true believer, he would downplay current financial problems as “not a major issue” announcing optimistically “we have hope we will grow.” Amar, whilst less formal in expression than Saluhideen, appeared equally committed to the QIC mission and just as upbeat:

I think it’s getting better now, but when I was there it definitely felt like it was a bit of a struggle from the teachers’ point of view and me being a teaching assistant as well.

(Interview with researcher, Zamzam Primary School, July 2015)

The optimism articulated by Saluhideen and Amar might be attributable to the fact that they were still relatively young, enthusiastic and current employees of Queensbridge Islamic Centre. Nevertheless, this did not detract from a uniform assessment of finances and facilities being inadequate amongst teaching staff. I now

share how some of Saluhideen and Amar's more jaded colleagues felt this was not the only issue at ZPS.

6.42 Disorganisation

For some participants, the lack of resources and finances at Zamzam Primary School seemed symptomatic of the underdeveloped infrastructure and disorganisation at a managerial level in Queensbridge Islamic Centre. A number of teachers identified disorganisation compounding the day-to-day difficulties they experienced - a downwards configurational cause. Informants drew unfavourable comparisons between Zamzam Primary and state schools, claiming that the experience, expertise and support networks required to help teachers, especially those new to the profession, were a standard feature of the mainstream sector but absent in their own setting.

I begin with Zara, who contrasted state and Muslim schools, highlighting how a solid infrastructure could positively inform teaching and learning:

Zara: State schools are far more organised.

Tom: Really?

Z: Yeah. Far more organised.

T: Could you explain in more detail?

Z: In terms of resources, er, if I need help I know who to go to, there's a support system in place so this is why because when I came here, the first week, no-one helped me they just put me in the classroom and I was like: what's going on!

(Interview with researcher, Zamzam Primary School, October 2016)

The disorganisation Zara claims to have encountered as a new teacher in Zamzam Primary can be understood as a downwards configurational cause. Moreover, in identifying responsibility for this Zara exhibited the same imprecision in phrasing, pinpointed by Nichols & Beyon in their study of the workplace, through her own use of pronouns: "no-one helped me they just put me in the classroom." Zara also asserted that were it not for the intervention of a considerate senior colleague (Abdur-Raheem) she would have struggled even more. Intriguingly, Zara's account differs from Sarah, who earlier testified to an immersive experience at Zamzam

Primary wherein colleagues' expertise could be absorbed and implemented: "the experience they brought; their practices; their theories; their up-to-date knowledge on education systems." Perhaps individual outlook and agency could provide a partial explanation for events experienced at the actual level, in this case, the disorientation of a new employee.

As a much younger person than Zara, and one new to the profession of teaching, Saffiyah drew upon her childhood memories as a British-Pakistani girl attending state school to weigh up the various merits and deficiencies of the mainstream and faith sectors. Saffiyah highlighted institutional disorganisation at Zamzam Primary as problematic:

Tom: Looking back to the primary school you went to, was there anything similar or different to this school?

Saffiyah: It's gonna sound a bit bad but it was a lot more organised. Sorry to say.

T: More organised here or in a state school?

S: In a state school.

T: And when you say organised how do you mean that?

S: I mean as in- working from- I'm not talking about the school 'cause I haven't worked in the school; I'm talking about nurseries. Things are put in place, you know what you're doing; I'm talking as a staff member, I'm not a parent or anything. As a staff member, things are put in place for you; you know what you're doing, when you're doing, how you're doing you're getting support left, right and centre. I think it's a bit more difficult.

T: Why is that?

S: Cause you haven't- you're kind of doing it on your own.

T: Why are you doing it on your own?

S: Cause you haven't got that support.

(Interview with researcher, Zamzam Primary School, November 2015)

Examining the extract above one might be struck by Saffiyah's succinct answers, a recurring feature of our interview. As a critical realist ethnographer seeking to identify deep structures and unearthing underlying processes, one may postulate that 19 year-old Saffiyah - Zamzam Primary's youngest member of staff at the time - had less life experience and professional expertise to draw upon when responding to

my questions. In addition, a conservative reading of Islam might have informed Saffiyah's cautious approach to gender interactions (see Inge, 2016a). Saffiyah's behaviour around me was noticeably different to other female participants, who were much more relaxed, most likely attributable to individual personalities and familiar working relations. For example, A'rfa worked in close proximity to me for two years as a teaching assistant (as noted earlier) and two thereafter in a student-mentor relationship as she participated on an Open University course; Vanessa was an extremely cheerful and extroverted individual; likewise, Zara, Rumaysah and Sumayah, who I also quickly bonded with on account of our shared experiences of Somali cultures. Regardless, I certainly had to put in additional effort to solicit responses as a consequence of Saffiyah's reserved and softly spoken character. My explanations would become an integral part of the interview process to ensure my informant understood my questions. Looking back, my interview techniques hopefully enabled Saffiyah to connect with me as colleague, co-religionist and researcher and thus feel sufficiently comfortable to share her experiences and opinions. My approach was very much reflexive and situated in the moment, responding to (what I perceived to be) the needs of a participant to ensure data could be generated easily but in an exacting fashion. As a consequence, Saffiyah shared a number of insights, not least of which being that structural instability resulted in educators "doing it on your own" because support structures were not "put in place for you." Decisions made by senior leadership could be understood to be downwards configurational causes for events at the actual level impacting upon employees: "my manager might not think we need more staff members."

A'rfa, only a couple of years older than Saffiyah, also identified understaffing as contributing to daily challenges. This resulted in her - a relative newcomer to teaching - being tasked with more duties than she could complete in her contracted hours. The discussion opens with A'rfa having just provided an inventory of her many responsibilities at Zamzam Primary; she then draws an unfavourable (and perhaps unfair) comparison between a single small faith school and state schools as a whole:

Tom: Is that normative practice for someone with your lack of experience?

A'rfa: I don't think it is compared to other state schools; I think they had more TAs or classroom assistants to provide the support.

T: What might cause that set of circumstances?

A: Maybe, understaffed

T: Is it unique to that school or common to other faith schools?

A: Faith school?

T: Yeah.

A: It's probably because they are not well funded; it's quite- you try and make do with what you can.

(Skype interview with researcher, researcher's home, February 2016)

A'rfa's exploration of understaffing attributable to limited finances can be seen as a downwards configurational cause although she didn't specify how or why the organisation was constrained financially. Such circumstances were probably explicable by A'rfa being a junior member of staff at Zamzam Primary and thus probably not privy to financial information in a way that Sami, Dasham or Saluhideen as governors would be. Revisiting the data, an opportunity was lost to probe A'rfa further to explain why ZPS operated on a small budget, necessitating an admirable stoicism on her part ("you try and make do with what you can") reminiscent of some of her true believing colleagues, although perhaps not matching Saluhideen's unwavering commitment. A'rfa, like many participants, presented disorganisation as a nebulous quality inherent to Zamzam Primary yet absent in the state sector. However, aside from blaming management, none of my informants could or would identify the specific individuals or generative mechanism for this disarray. Firstly, such disclosures perhaps indicate some level of trust between participants and myself in my role both as work colleague, researcher and - perhaps less so – coreligionist; after all, management were also Muslims. An unwillingness to go into greater detail could also be born of wariness towards me or, more likely, being unaware of the inner workings of the organisation, born of a lack of connection and/or communication between those running the organisation and those on the ground. One might also examine underlying structures (both physical and psychological) as a contributing factor, including the topography of Queensbridge Islamic Centre (incorporating the mosque, madrassa and Zamzam Primary), an estate

comprised of four separate structures purchased over time and not purpose-built for function. Coupled with a culture of gender separation, (especially in the mosque and madrassa although relaxed to a certain degree in Zamzam Primary) and an all male management team, interactions between male and female members of staff were not only less frequent than they might be in the mainstream workplace but weighted (whether purposely, carelessly or coincidentally) in favour of men, who dominated physical spaces more. Regardless, in my participants' estimation, institutional disorganisation was attributable to the amorphous "them" referred to in Nichols and Beyon's 1977 study: management, a downwards configurational cause.

6.43 Failed Fellowship, Superficial Spirituality

I have shown how teaching participants felt frustration at the limited finances and resources available at ZPS, alongside a building not designed for teaching in and management they perceived to be disorganised. All of the above contributed to their negative experiences working in a Muslim school. Another factor was less physically tangible or measurable using quantitative metrics: an emotional let-down at an expected level of religiosity in the environment and amongst colleagues. This had been previously alluded to, in passing, at the beginning of chapter 5.5 in which participants offered commentary on the disconnect between the ideal Muslim school and the reality of Zamzam Primary. An explanation of such scepticism might be informants' "insider knowledge" of occurrences at the actual level, although some participants would remain true believers invested entirely in the school mission (whether privy to its shortcomings or choosing to overlook them) such as Nadeem and Samir. Others, however, were more sceptical.

I begin with the views of "scorner" Maryam, who would express her individual outlook on Zamzam Primary's outwardly impressive Islamic "effect" (Panjwani, 2009) but insubstantial spiritual substance:

I don't see a lot of the religion in our environment. Erm, I see salah, dua, Qur'an, Islamic Studies, Ramadan, Eid, dress code. It's the supe- it's the on top, yeah. Yeah, exterior look.

(Interview with researcher, Zamzam Primary School, October 2015)

Whilst Maryam’s critique of Zamzam Primary as a Muslim school unsurprisingly identified the choice of clothing as an overt or obvious display of the “trappings of faith” (Wilkinson, 2015: 176) (something that parents Marwa, Vanessa and Jamal would also do – see chapter 7), her scepticism also extended to rituals such as prayer, fasting and supplication as well as studies and celebrations (Eid). With such scepticism and/or hyperbole concerning the substance of Zamzam’s school culture, one might question whether any Islam remained in such an apparently irreligious environment. However, this “exterior look” of Zamzam Primary School and Queensbridge Islamic Centre did present a convincing and credible representation of religiosity to some outsiders, as acknowledged by Rumaysah and Sumayah. Their exchange commences following a brief analysis of the differences between Muslim and state schools:

Rumaysah: But don’t you think its perception because everyone thinks you work in a mosque like everything is good.

Sumayah: Yes.

R: Like my family think that.

S: Yeah.

R: They think it’s so fantastic; you work in a mosque and you’re with Muslims. I don’t know. Everyone has the idea that everyone’s so friendly and everyone’s so helpful, which is not true.

S: But I used to have that perception.

R: Yeah, but I don’t get it cause when you’re out in the world you don’t think that Muslims are all good.

Tom: Is it because the grass is greener?

R: No it’s just everyone thinks ideally. And even my mum’s like: you get to go in the mosque; you get to pray salah; you get to read Qur’an; you work with Muslims. My mum thinks you’re like. Earning ajar, you’re earning reward the whole day; it’s like, that’s not the case.

(Interview with researcher, Zamzam Primary School, July 2015)

In this extract, Rumaysah and Sumayyah identify a disconnect between appearance and reality: the exemplary Islamic environment promised a climate of conviviality and cooperation that would be alluring to both converts like Abdur-Raheem and born Muslims like Sumayah (“I used to have that perception”). Intriguingly, none of the

participants identified where this perception of an idyllic institution had actually originated – perhaps belief and emotional investment in existing Islamic ideology (or ideologies) reproduced over centuries was a causal mechanism for such disillusionment. This let-down from arcadia to actuality may have contributed in part to Rumaysah and Sumayah’s own personal disenchantment: both would leave Zamzam Primary a couple of months after their interview, alongside TA Haniyah and another colleague (the mother of former pupil Shams), under immensely acrimonious circumstances pertaining to grievances with management. Saffiyah would also depart six months later due to extended absences from duty. This high turnover of staff was not only an occurrence at Zamzam Primary but a common feature of the Islamic educational sector, as noted by Merry (2010) and Breen (2009), especially amongst female educators – a phenomenon former ZPS-pupil Fatima would raise when discussing her experiences of attending Muslim secondary schools. Moreover, such high attrition rates were also common in the mainstream educational sector in the UK amongst teachers with qualified status (Day et al, 2011 and Weale, 2015); for example, almost a third of new teachers who started working in state schools in 2010 had quit five years later (BBC News, 2016). Perhaps staff departures in Zamzam Primary were less a reflection of life in Muslim schools but typical of the teaching profession as a whole in the UK.

Returning to our interview that occurred a couple months before ZPS management terminated her contract, Saffiyah sketched out an institutional Islamic atmosphere, a veil under which insincere or unscrupulous individuals could operate to exploit coreligionists’ good intentions:

I feel like sometimes people take Muslim brothers and sisters as a card sometimes. A Muslim card as in, you know, do this for me it’s okay, let things slide, you’re Muslim kind of thing.

(Interview with researcher, Zamzam Primary School, November 2015)

Rumaysah, would suggest in colloquial language that playing the “Muslim card” was not just a matter of idle expediency but deliberate malpractice and a deterioration from Zamzam Primary’s golden age, as she recalled it:

I remember, actually, there was one point where all the sisters were niqabis except for me. That was like right at the start of the school. I know this sounds bad but I feel people were more religious.... I think now people pretend to be.

(Interview with researcher, Zamzam Primary School, July 2015)

In her reflections, Rumaysah romanticises Zamzam Primary's past in a manner similar to Sami and Marwa, who had also been involved with the school since its inception. During this period, "right at the start of the school," the atmosphere was more religious as manifested in individual ("people were more sincere") and interpersonal conduct ("staff had a much more closer relationship before"). This heightened state of religiosity was also evidenced in the choice of clothing worn by the majority of female colleagues ("there was one point where all the sisters were Niqabis except for me") - sanctity manifest in clothing worn. However, in Zamzam Primary's current and less harmonious iteration, there existed a disconnect between a publically performed piety and the inner reality ("people behave how they think they should behave not necessarily who they are"). For both Saffiyah and Rumaysah, insincere interpersonal relations with colleagues that countered Islamic ideals of fellowship, undermined an institutional atmosphere of religiosity; using Vincent and Wapshott's model of workplace structures and practices I understand these as upwards normative causes.

Maryam would also critique this superficial spirituality in much greater detail, providing specific examples that included insincere and intrusive encroachments into personal space ("stop touching me, you don't need to get in my face"); excessive involvement in individual affairs that did not concern colleagues ("passing remarks and comments") and even questioning one's competency as a professional ("they think I'm not doing my work properly"). Especially interesting was her assertion that this sort of behaviour was much more pronounced amongst female members of staff:

Let's put it straight, the sisters talk about each other. You have to play it nice and put on a different face for who you're talking to and you have to protect yourself and you can't- you have to be really careful cause you just don't know who to trust.

Generally there's really just a negative vibe amongst the sisters and it's all fake; you know it's fake. I don't find half of it sincere. Sometimes it's a bit over the top; I'm okay, you can stop it now.

(Interview with researcher, Zamzam Primary School, October 2015)

Whether this “negative vibe”, documented in the empirical domain as participant experiences, really was more pronounced at the actual level of reality amongst “the sisters” than male staff members at Zamzam Primary is open to debate. One might explain the alleged preponderance of disingenuous conduct amongst female employees being statistically more probable on account of ZPS employing more female members of staff. In addition, formalised gender relations in a religiously conservative environment could lead to an increase in intra-actions rather than interactions amongst the genders, although I could not prove this empirically. For similar reasons, one might also posit that essentialised gender characteristics such as female capriciousness or motherliness might circulate more and carry credence in such a space, being reproduced and articulated as such by other female participants - the latter notion certainly was (see A’rfa’s comments in chapter 6.44). Regardless, Maryam possessed a heightened awareness of “so much politics and stuff behind closed doors going on” and her response to a climate (that I specifically have described as being) of failed fellowship and superficial spirituality, be it real or exaggerated, was to be “really careful” and “to play it nice.” However, in ZPS’ defence, Maryam did disclose how the atmosphere in her previous setting “was even worse” with her manager being “the worst one out of all of them!” For Maryam, office politics were an unpalatable part of life in both secular and religious spaces.

The only male participant who alluded to the superficial “spirituality” was Abdur-Raheem, but this was identified as a general shortcoming of Muslim schools as opposed to Zamzam Primary per se. Merry has previously identified staff burnout as one of the challenges working in Muslim schools (2010). Abdur-Raheem explained how, for a time at least, he too felt disillusioned and exhausted but more so on account of the unprofessional and dishonest behaviour of colleagues and insufficient resources:

Abdur-Raheem: I got sick and tired of Muslims schools because of lack of professionalism-

Tom: Yeah.

AR: Lack of resources, lack of trust-

T: Really?

AR: Lack of trust because people you believe are, you know, fearful of God, God fearing, pious, righteous people – you find out their intentions are not exactly what you expected so because you as a Muslim, a new Muslim, who you just open up you become naïve and they take advantage of it and this was part- partly why I had- I went through a stage of negativity, thoughts, and didn't want to go back to Muslim schools

(Interview with researcher, Zamzam Primary School, June 2015)

Of the three different reasons underlying his disenchantment, Abdur-Raheem outlined the “lack of trust” in most detail, describing his early days in the faith as being “a bit naïve.” Whilst the naïve sincerity or “innocence” of the Muslim convert has been documented previously (Suleiman, 2016), perhaps this quality is not the exclusive preserve of those new to faith (Islam or otherwise) but the newly observant or practising devotee who had been born into religion, as Maryam recalls:

I guess a bit of naivety got in there, you know, thinking everyone would be this sort of Islamic brother-sister kind of thing.

(Interview with researcher, Zamzam Primary School, October 2015)

It is this characteristic of “naivety” that was easily exploited by the unprincipled with their appeals to fellowship in Muslim schools (according to Abdur-Raheem) and Zamzam Primary specifically (in Maryam and Saffiyah's accounts). Despite his disillusionment, Abdur-Raheem would eventually return to Muslim schools, seeing it as a “privilege” to work in such environments. Maryam, however, exhibited signs of the aforementioned burnout, catalysed by resources and office politics that even led to her departure from Zamzam Primary for a period:

I left cause it was just unbelievable and then a few colleagues³⁹ came to my house and just literally begged me to come back.

(Interview with researcher, Zamzam Primary School, October 2015)

Without going into great detail about what precipitated her departure from Zamzam Primary, Maryam returned to the school, maintaining she only stayed in her current role on account of “the holidays”, “the money” and her need for “the experience of being a TA.” Moreover, Maryam's frustrations were compounded by a lack of recognition for her diligent efforts:

³⁹ One being Rumaysah.

I think people who are- who have something good from before when they come here slowly, slowly it starts to die out and the blood gets sucked out of you. Slowly, slowly it starts to fizzle out. Some of it because the resources are not available, some of it because you lack the motivation because no-one appreciates anything you do erm, or no-one sees it, no-one says it; it's not directed it's general to everyone: congratulations, mashallah. Who you talking to, you know? So slowly- someone really good could come and slowly, slowly it will just drain out or lose their zest.

(Interview with researcher, Zamzam Primary School, October 2015)

Analysing Maryam's language closely, one might notice she begins her observation in the third person ("I think people who are- who have something good from before when they come here") before transitioning on the "slowly" into using the second person pronoun to denote the first person ("slowly it starts to die out and the blood gets sucked out of you"). By the end of the extract, Maryam has returned to her third person observation ("So slowly- someone really good could come and slowly, slowly it will just drain out or lose their zest"); individual experience (the actual level) is informing an anecdotal observation (recorded at the empirical level). Whilst resources were a recurring issue, the underlying problem at Zamzam Primary for Maryam was one of respect. A spiritual burnout amongst Muslims has been noted by Brown (2016), whilst the teacher burnout referred to by Abdur-Raheem and Maryam has been referenced earlier in this chapter.

Lastly, former governor Sami (and his wife) gave credence to Maryam's remarks as he empathised with the plight of Zamzam Primary's teachers:

Sami: They are putting lot of effort in work, you know, and that effort is not recognised by the management, sometimes, and you see other part- other people are putting in less, you understand, and it's just-

Marwa: Unfairness.

(Interview with researcher, family home, October 2015)

Sami critiqued unappreciative leaders ("the management") whilst also highlighting differing levels of commitment amongst staff ("other people are putting in less"). The nature of the supposedly moral economy of Zamzam Primary was one wherein appearance and reality could and did differ, as was especially apparent to individuals like Rumaysah, Sumayah, Saffiyah and Maryam who all would leave their roles at one time or another. Other colleagues such as Abdur-Raheem also articulated their disappointment with an environment and actors therein, who did not embody an

idealised Islam but chose to endure as pragmatic survivors. I now examine a final and perhaps less contentious issue for teaching participants but an issue nevertheless: boundaries.

6.44 Blurred Lines

As part of the wider Queensbridge Islamic Centre umbrella, parents, pupils and practitioners in ZPS were embedded in a small faith community connected by a dense social network (Milroy & Milroy, 1992). Teaching assistant Ar'fa – who would encounter this atmosphere when she moved from Kent to Queensbridge, finding employment at Zamzam Primary - perceived it as problematic:

A'rfa: It's all about the community so to keep that separate- they might know each other outside the community, they might even be family outside of community but within the school environment you have to separate it but it is quite hard.

Tom: Did you ever experience that lack of barrier between parents and staff?

A: Yeah, I think I could see it with myself as well!

T: (Laughs.)

A: Especially because I was friends with some of the children's parents.

T: Oh, really.

A: So I would go round to their house and stuff so they would see me in an informal setting so they would sometimes bring that- their personality from the informal setting into the school.

(Skype interview with researcher, researcher's home, February 2015)

A'rfa articulated the importance of fellowship amongst the Muslims of Queensbridge, whilst contrasting it with a personal need to “keep that separate”, albeit in a way that was not always enforced. Perhaps A'rfa's difficulties in maintaining boundaries were exacerbated by her youth: she began volunteering at Zamzam Primary as a sixteen year old A-Level student and, in her eagerness to please, would find it hard to say no to requests, especially those made by management or senior colleagues. According to A'rfa, relaxed social interactions (but perhaps not gender relations) amongst the close-knit Queensbridge community were the (upwards normative) cause for obfuscation of boundaries in the school environment. The resulting informality with pupils would manifest as “play-fighting”, “banter” and “private jokes” and this unceremoniousness was also a trait

found amongst other female members of staff. In contrast, A'rfa suggested there was "more of a distance with the students with the male staff than there is with female staff", attributing the blurring of boundaries to "sisters" being "quite motherly with the students;" A'rfa, like Maryam before her (on the subject of pseudo-sisterhood) outlining essentialised gender specific attributes and roles in a manner reminiscent of educators in Bethany Baptist Academy (Peshkin, 1986).

Nadeem would also raise concerns over preserving boundaries from a similar perspective:

Nadeem: I've been teaching in Muslim schools so sometimes I consider these kids as my kids, no, which is little bit wrong. It has a limit like, I don't know, percentage probably 70-

Tom: Yeah.

N: That's how it is.

T: How do you maintain those professional boundaries?

N: Yeah. Well, I think, er, to do that you need a lot of skills and- and this skills need to, you have to dig it out and because mainly, we are doing from 8 o' clock to 3:30 and this time is, er, a little bit, you know, er- more stuff you have to do and you really have to be clever in a sense where you have to be professional but at the same times being looking after the children. Er, I would say in percentage: do not accept this percentage, er, just to be professional as much as you can.

(Interview with researcher, Zamzam Primary School, October 2015)

Nadeem, a parent (albeit not to children in the school) as well as a teacher, would "consider these kids as my kids." Likewise, the kindly Mr. Lawrence in Evans's ethnography of a Jamaican high school would also regard his pupils as "his boys and his girls" (2006: 97) as would teachers in Martinez's Florida Islamic School (2012). However, whilst participants in those studies did not see this as problematic, Nadeem felt his own outlook was a "little bit wrong." The solution was to be "professional as much as you can," yet professionalism in a Muslim school like Zamzam Primary seemed to be a quality less pronounced than in the mainstream sector according to participant accounts. Balancing the compassion and communality required of the devout Muslim with the restraint and rigour demanded of the modern professional appeared to be one of many challenges for practitioners working in Zamzam Primary.

6.5 Conclusion

In chapters 6.3 and 6.4, I have sought to answer research question 2.1: why do teachers chose to work in a Muslim school? In doing so, I have also addressed elements of research question one, concerning what it means to be an independent Muslim school in Queensbridge. I have described the first pull factor for participants to work in Zamzam Primary as its moral economy. Informants described an overtly religious environment that facilitated the observance of their faith and I would be inclined to agree, synthesising my emic and etic views as both employee and researcher. Zamzam Primary certainly was an Islamic institution replete with elements and expressions of the faith, most notably in the performance of the congregational prayer that was undoubtedly a major draw for its religiously observant workforce. Opportunities to wear Islamic clothing and use religious language were also cited by predominantly female participants as positives, although imprecision in the conceptualisation and articulation of these themes was noticeable. By extension, one might also probe further to understand what is meant by a moral economy and whether this actually conformed (and to what degree) to idealised visions of a monolithic Islam held by many participants.

This disconnect that I have described throughout this chapter as a “failed fellowship, superficial spirituality”, links back to research question 1 which prompted my exploration of the main areas of difficulty experienced by ZPS employees in their working lives. I started with informants’ inventories of the limited resources, inadequate facilities – from paper to playground – and unqualified employees, all of which impacted deleteriously upon teaching and learning. I also heard of the admirable stoicism required to survive such challenges and its perceived lack of appreciation amongst senior team leaders. Participants shared what I interpret as downwards configurational causes for this problem: disorganised management and an insufficient support network for staff, that informants contrasted unfavourably with the robust infrastructure found in state schools. Offering my own emic view, I might add that this disorganisation may have been a manifestation of senior leaders being overstretched (itself born of limited finances and a subsequent inability to hire appropriately experienced and adept staff in sufficient numbers): Maryam’s observation that “they’ll have one person doing five people’s jobs” was not entirely inaccurate. For example, prior to the commencement of this study, the Head had also

doubled as the school's Arabic teacher for five years. During the 2014/15 academic year he also worked as the acting centre manager for Queensbridge Islamic Centre; meanwhile, the school deputy was also employed part-time as an Early Years teacher and leader. Following her departure, this role was given to Abdur-Raheem who became the Year 3&4 class teacher for 2016/17, the merging of two year groups itself born of necessity on account of limited space in the building, that meant there were only 7 classrooms for 8 year groups.

Moving on, a key grievance expressed by my participants was the disconnect between the ideal Muslim school and the reality of ZPS, the aforementioned failed fellowship and superficial spirituality. A number of participants, both convert and heritage Muslims, disclosed their naivety in believing in this ideal without identifying the origin of the "myth." Participants' choice of language, dress and ritual might upwardly generate an Islamic effect or ambience convincing outsiders unacquainted with the inner workings of the institution of its religious integrity and upstanding employees. However, many staff with their insider knowledge felt disappointed and disenfranchised at how some colleagues would exploit relationships, supposedly established upon and edified by shared faith, for unscrupulous objectives. Perhaps this is why the disappointment felt by certain staff members regarding this failed fellowship and superficial spirituality was so pronounced. This disconnect between an idealised Islam and the reality at the actual level of ZPS relates back to informants' earlier articulations of the nature of the Muslim school, its ethos and curriculum and discussions, addressed in the literature review. Whilst this inconsistency between an authentic Islam and its performed reality was established in the empirical domain via participant interviews, determining the causal processes, be they systematic or psychological, for events experienced at the actual level proved much more difficult. Perhaps easier to identify and understand was the blurring of boundaries amongst professionals and parents in a close-knit faith community linked by dense network ties. Having heard from teaching staff connected to Zamzam Primary, I now turn to parents and pupils in chapter 7.

Chapter 7: The Parents and Pupils of Zamzam Primary School

7.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I share the experiences and opinions of the wider Queensbridge community, more specifically, parents who sent their children to Zamzam Primary and pupils who previously attended the school. One issue of particular interest in this chapter involves the overlapping roles in the Queensbridge community: of the 16 parents interviewed, six had some involvement with Zamzam Primary as an employee. I explore this further in my writing, alongside examining participants' positive and negative experiences of their involvement with ZPS and why parents invested in Islamic education in the first place, to answer my second research question concerning how informants perceive and experience the role and purpose of the Muslim school in the community. Presently, the table below provides an introduction to the participants both young and old contributing to this chapter.

Figure 10: Parents and Pupils Participating in Research

Name	Gender	Ethnicity	Age	Role
Aaqib	Male	Bengali	30s	Parent
Abdur-Rahmeem	Male	Spanish	40s	Teacher & Parent
Abu Fatima	Male	Bengali	50s	Parent
Ayan	Female	Somali	Teens	Pupil
Connor	Male	White British	30s	Parent
Fatima	Female	Bengali	Teens	Pupil
Hamda	Female	Somali	30s	Parent
Hamud	Male	Turkish	20s	Teacher & Parent
Ibrahim	Male	Somali	40s	Parent
Ishaaq	Male	Algerian/Portuguese	Teens	Pupil
Jamal	Male	Turkish	30s	Parent & QIC Caretaker
Junaid	Male	White British/	30s	Parent

		Jamaican		
Mahmoud	Male	Somali	30s	Administrator & Parent
Marwa	Female	Portuguese/French	40s	Parent
Sami	Male	Algerian	40s	Governor & Parent
Shams	Male	Somali	Teens	Pupil
Ubbah	Female	Somali	40s	Parent
Umm Ayan	Female	Somali	30s	Parent
Umm Neimo	Female	Somali	30s	Parent
Vanessa	Female	White British/ Turkish	20s	Canteen Manager & Parent
Yasmeen	Female	White British/ Algerian	Teens	Pupil

7.2 Parental Engagement with Islamic Education

In this chapter, I seek to respond to research question 2.2 and explore the reasons why participants sent their children to Zamzam Primary. Three main themes emerged: most frequently cited was the notion that ZPS was a guarded space (Tripp, 2006: 31), an Islamic environment in which pupils could study their religion and practise its rituals alongside learning practical worldly knowledge that would facilitate social mobility. Secondly, participants who had been born and raised in the UK mentioned their own negative experiences of attending state schools as a reason for their disillusionment and ultimately disengagement with the state sector, opting to send their children to ZPS. One parent would also outline her children's negative experiences with mainstream education as a motivating factor in relocating them to Zamzam Primary. Finally, a number of parents presented an ideological critique of mainstream schooling as a driver for their involvement with ZPS, with recurrent critique of sexual politics and teaching. I begin by examining the ideas and opinions of parents who felt that Zamzam Primary provided an ideal Islamic environment for academic excellence and spiritual growth.

7.21 “The Best of Both Worlds: Academic Excellence, Spiritual Growth”

Many parents revealed that they chose to send their children to study at Zamzam Primary because they trusted the Islamicness of its environment and the schoolness of the institution. Adelhah & Sakurai’s comments concerning the global madrasa system issues of trust, accountability and readying pupils for a market economy could also be applicable to Zamzam Primary as a Muslim school:

Madrasahs, which are built on confidence – confidence of families vis-a-vis and institution deemed pious and not-for-profit... are today faced with the vital need for accountability, not only in the face of government, from which they must gain recognition and whose regulations must be respected, but also vis-à-vis students, who need to be able to use their education in the job market and who become users – or rather consumers – by virtue of the fact they pay school fees.

(Adelhah & Keiko, 2011: 8)

In the forthcoming extracts, parents frequently express their “confidence” in Zamzam Primary as a “pious and not-for-profit” institution imparting an Islamically informed education that they feel met the demands of the secular job market; accordingly, they pay for its services as “consumers.” This trust is corroborated by teachers’ accounts in earlier chapters (especially 5.2: “The Ethos Underpinning Islamic Education” and 6.43: “Failed Fellowship, Superficial Spirituality”), describing parental and community perceptions of Zamzam Primary and QIC as authentically Islamic environments where a “true Islam” (Miah, 2015; 113) was taught, studied and practised.

I begin with the views of Hamud, who articulates the obligation of providing an Islamic education for his daughters:

Hamud: It is compulsory for me to send my children here.

Tom: Why.

H: Even if I didn’t like any of the teachers, it is compulsory for me. Because the school - Islamic school has a religious ethos and it draws a line in certain places.

(Interview with researcher, Zamzam Primary School, June 2015)

Hamud would identify earlier in our interview (see chapter 5.2), what the ethos of a Muslim school was based on (“Sunnah and the Qur’an”), but did not elaborate further what this entailed at the actual level, perhaps because I, as a fellow Muslim

and educator, would automatically understand the terms. When later discussing the ideology of state schools (chapter 7.23), Hamud would explain what this line of demarcation actually entailed.

For other participants, such as Abu Fatima, an Islamic environment in which pupils could acquire a good education was a motivating factor to send their children to Zamzam Primary. In the extract below, Abu Fatima explains his reasons for enrolling his daughter Fatima in a Muslim school:

The reason being sending early to keep them into, er, educational framework. It's not only Islam, Islam is important plus you have to give them education as well. So Islam and education: good combination, if you can send them at the right age and to understand then they have to do their Islamic duty as well as a future bread-earner for family member could be the issue so you have to prepare them both Islamically for life as well as halal earning in their lifetime if they want to do anything.

(Interview with researcher, Zamzam Primary School, November 2015)

Abu Fatima expressed a pragmatic view whereby Islamic cultivation was coupled with economic practicalities, thus reiterating (be it purposeful or otherwise) the ZPS motto: “academic excellence and spiritual growth.” Like Hamud, Abu Fatima interwove the rhetoric of righteousness (“prepare them both Islamically for life”) alongside roles (“future bread-earner for family”) and responsibilities (“Islamic duty”). In attempting to understand Abu Fatima’s actions documented at the empirical level, one might attempt to identify the underlying causes for the ideas expressed. This appeared to be the outlook of an orthodox Muslim grounded in the social conservative’s 6-anchored moral matrix, whereby sanctity (for example, “halal earning”), authority and loyalty were foregrounded (Haidt, 2012). In addition, it could also have been the view of a first generation migrant parent seeing the education of his children not just as a route (Chen, 2007) but the route to social mobility (Louie, 2001).

Ibrahim would express similar ideas to Abu Fatima but more succinctly. In the extract below, he shares his reasons for sending his daughter and son to ZPS:

Zamzam Primary is an Islamic School. Erm, they have a curriculum in line with the national curriculum and outstanding school so that's one of the reason why I send my children there.

(Interview with researcher, Zamzam Primary School, December 2015)

For Ibrahim, the reason for his decision again appeared to be (like Abu Fatima) very much in line with Zamzam Primary's slogan: "The Best of Both Worlds: Academic Excellence and Spiritual Growth." Moreover, Ibrahim's remarks provided further support to the notion discussed earlier by many teachers, parents and pupils (chapter 5.3) that, for all intents and purposes, ZPS delivered the national curriculum, a practice widespread amongst Muslim schools in the UK (Mustafa, 1999; Hussain, 2004 and Lawson, 2005). Since the national curriculum was implemented in Zamzam Primary, Ibrahim's children were taught core and foundation subjects as they would be in a state school; they were not missing out on knowledge acquisition because of their attending a Muslim school. Whilst Ibrahim might have been more acquainted with Zamzam Primary's inner workings than other parents (on account of his formerly being the school's canteen manager and a member of the QIC management committee), his familiarity with policies, procedure and practice could not have been comparable to teaching staff or governors. His certainty regarding what was taught and how might therefore have been questioned by teachers, especially those scornful more sceptical of official positions. They might also have contested Ibrahim's description of ZPS as an "outstanding school." If this were a reference to Zamzam Primary's last inspection in 2013, then ZPS had actually been graded as "satisfactory" by the Ofsted team - as it had been on their previous two inspections in 2009 and 2012. It appears then that Ibrahim might have been expressing his own appraisal of the quality of teaching and learning at Zamzam Primary, his continuing personal satisfaction operating as a causal factor for his sending his children to ZPS as well as, perhaps, his commitment to the Queensbridge community and its mosque; a communality shared by other parents, most noticeably Sami and Marwa.

Ubbah, also described a fusion of secular education with spiritual cultivation as a motivating factor for enrolling her children in the school:

I decide because it's an Islamic school and Sunnah mosque here. I like it my kids is learning my religion and education together, that's why I decide.
(Interview with researcher, Zamzam Primary School, October 2015)

In the environment of an "Islamic school", Ubbah's children received the "Best of Both Worlds": "religion and education together," yet again, a reproduction

(knowingly or otherwise) of the ZPS slogan. In hindsight, one might have probed participants further to determine whether they were consciously recycling the ZPS motto or whether there was a more organic overlap in outlook. Further examination of Ubbah's words might indicate both ownership and impartment of faith. Her Islam ("my religion") was transmitted to her daughter and son in Zamzam Primary, albeit with agency attributed explicitly to her children ("my kids is learning") and implicitly to teaching staff; what can be understood to be an amalgamation of downwards and upwards causes. Alternatively, one could interpret Ubbah's statements as indicative of her more rudimentary skills in speaking English, albeit sufficient enough to communicate clearly with myself and in her job as a carer. An additional factor influencing Ubbah's decision to send her children to Zamzam Primary was that it was not just an "Islamic school" but part of the larger Queensbridge Islamic Centre - a "Sunnah mosque." The Sunnah was clearly of great importance to Ubbah. For example, elsewhere in our interview, Ubbah would refer to her particular community as being explicitly and exclusively devoted to the Sunnah ("Somali is Sunnah people. We come to the country 100% Sunnah people; this masjid is Sunnah"), a phenomenon also noted by Breen (2009) thus apparently precluding (for her) the possibility of their affiliation with other understandings; Somalis followed the "true Islam" (Miah, 2015: 113). Exploring ideas documented at the empirical level, one might attribute Ubbah's comfort in declaring her commitment to the Sunnah on account of my being a co-religionist – a fact Ubbah was aware of on account of my having interacted previously with her as a teacher who taught both her children. Ubbah's foregrounding of the Sunnah was also reminiscent of Hamud's earlier description of the founding principles of the "Islamic school" being "the Sunnah and the Qur'an."

Another Somali mother, Umm Neimo, would also identify the Islamic environment of Zamzam Primary as a causal factor for educating her daughter in the school:

The main reason is because it's Islamic school. I want my children to be in an environment where they'll be spending all day long practising their religion as well as getting educated and the second reason is because the school is, er, a small school my children will get, er, the way I believe more attention than a huge school where there will be thirty pupils in a classroom therefore my child- the chances of my child getting enough attention is very good in this school and those are the main two reasons but also the school, er, my brother came to this school.

(Interview with researcher, Zamzam Primary School, December 2015)

Umm Neimo's words demonstrate her conviction in the cause of Islamic education: Zamzam Primary was an environment conducive to religious observance. However, as previously noted, a number of teaching participants might have disagreed with parents' external impressions of an Islamic utopia. Like Ubbah, Umm Neimo attributed an agency to her children in their religious practice: they would spend "all day long practising their religion" in this environment. However, Umm Neimo's choice of pronoun to describe religion differed from Ubbah's. Whilst Ubbah wanted her children to be "learning my religion," Umm Neimo's children were "practising their religion." This could be understood as idiosyncratic and inconsequential phrasing or that Ubbah's children were still in the process of acquainting themselves with the tenets of faith, whereas Umm Neimo's children had already imbibed the fundamentals manifesting belief through action. Regardless, both parents saw Zamzam Primary as a school where their children could safely acquire religious knowledge and implement it in their actions. A second factor in Umm Neimo's decision to send her children to Zamzam Primary was that it was a "small school" in which her children would receive "more attention than a huge school where there will be thirty pupils in a classroom" – a reason echoed elsewhere in my interview with Connor ("Private schools have smaller classes because they can and so that's- that's one big reason"). A final influential factor was that Umm Neimo's (considerably) younger brother had also attended Zamzam Primary. Whilst younger children gaining admission to the same school as their elder siblings might be commonplace in state schools, this occurrence might also have been indicative of the Queensbridge community's dense social network – to be highlighted by former ZPS pupil Ishaaq (2006-2012) and his mother Marwa (in chapter 7.42) as well as earlier by TAs A'rfa and Nadeem.

For Umm Ayan, "religion" was also presented by her translator Umm Neimo as a primary reason for her children's attendance at Zamzam Primary. Umm Neimo explains:

The sister said, um, basically the reason why she chose an is- Islamic school, first of all, is the religion and second of all, is the behaviour. She said, um, the behaviour is very important and she said, um, because she has an experience with a state school

she knows what the child will be like in state school and what the child is like in this school.

(Interview with researcher, Zamzam Primary School, December 2015)

In this extract, “the religion” is described as the primary reason for the enrolment of Umm Ayan’s children in ZPS without further explanation. Perhaps there was expectancy on the part of my participants (as appeared to be the case earlier with Ubbah and Hamud) that I would automatically understand what terms like “religion”, “Qur’an” and “Sunnah” entailed on account of my being a co-religionist. Nevertheless, Umm Neimo would go on to share her friend’s expectancies of pupil behaviour in a Muslim school such as Zamzam Primary, drawing favourable comparisons to state schools. The subject of negative impressions and experiences of state settings will be addressed in chapter 7.22 (Individual Experiences of State Schools) as additional factors for enrolment.

One might situate Jamal on the same continuum as the parents above regarding personal motivations for involvement in Islamic education. Like Umm Neimo, a sense of familiarity was presented by Jamal as a reason for his daughter being educated in Zamzam Primary, alongside the school being a safe space:

One of the reasons was because it’s an Islamic environment, yeah, so, erm, I would like my daughter to be, er, educated in that kind of an environment. Erm, also, the fact that I work here as well. But, erm, I think one of the reasons ’cause we know the school very well - that was one of the reasons – ‘cause we know the school very well, the teachers, so we know how the school runs, so how, er, the teachers, the background of the teachers and so on; so that’s some of the reasons, yeah.

(Interview with researcher, Zamzam Primary School, June 2015)

Jamal worked as a caretaker at Queensbridge Islamic Centre and thus had regular access to the ZPS site. As a consequence, the account he shared was one in which he was well acquainted with both institution and individuals. Jamal stated how he and - one presumes - his wife were familiar with Zamzam Primary (“we know the school very well”), a statement which could have encompassed the physical building but more likely to mean the actual organisation and its operations. It certainly appears Jamal meant his familiarity with (downwards) configurational norms, as he would go on to describe awareness of procedures (“we know how the school runs”) and professional practice (“the background of the teachers”). With prompting, Jamal

would go on clarify what he meant by “the background of the teachers” in greater detail:

Tom: What sort of things would you get to see behind the scenes that other parents wouldn't get to see?

Jamal: The way the teachers interact with the students because I'm here and there, I'm around, so I can see them in the playground, even in the classes, I can see the teachers how they interact with the students, and it's positive, I see it as a positive interaction.

(Interview with researcher, Zamzam Primary School, June 2015)

This insider information that Jamal the employee had access to, created a positive feedback loop for Jamal the parent, informing his decision to enrol his daughter in Zamzam Primary and subsequently vindicating it. In contrast, awareness of the inner workings of Zamzam Primary appeared to act as a negative feedback loop amongst more cynical colleagues, resulting in disenchantment and in some cases, departure from teaching there (i.e. Rumaysah and Sumayah). From my interactions with Jamal, it seemed that he - as both employee and consumer - was a true believer in the mission of Zamzam Primary and QIC as a whole.

A follower employee of QIC and, more specifically, a member of the Zamzam Primary's leadership team, Abdur-Raheem, like Jamal, also possessed insider information about the school. The extract below begins following Abdur-Raheem's musings on the importance of cultivating good morals and manners in children:

Tom: Is that why you sent your son to a Muslim school, to cultivate character?

Abdur-Raheem: For me it's reinforcement already. For me it's reinforcement.

(Interview with researcher, Zamzam Primary School, June 2015)

Abdur-Raheem's succinct comments seem to support the notion of the school slogan of “spiritual excellence”, albeit coming with a caveat:

Abdur-Raheem: I think what happens is- there's different things. The parent that thinks that my child is protected in this environment: you're going to have a problem, you've got parents with good intentions to protect my child from the environment, from all this evil which is apparently out there and you can't do that.

Tom: Of course.

AR: You can't do that because for you to do that you have to go up in the mountains with some goats and sheep, you know, and just become er-

T: A nomad!

AR: Yeah! Urban life: forget all this and then you'll be all right! You wouldn't have problems with people; it'd just be you with your camels!

T: Yeah (laughs).

AR: If you live here you cannot protect you have to prepare. For me, this "protect" doesn't work. You actually prepare in order to protect, in itself. This is what we mean. It's hard work.

(Interview with researcher, Zamzam Primary School, June 2015)

As noted previously, Abdur-Raheem would conflate his experiences at Zamzam Primary with Muslim schools as a whole, perhaps because he had worked in a number of them as well as state schools. Whilst Abdur-Raheem saw Zamzam Primary, and by extension, other Muslim schools as institutions in which pupils could and would encounter, internalise and implement good "akhlaq and adab" (manners), he would differentiate his outlook from other (unspecified) Muslim parents. The Muslim school was not a total institution, a hermetically sealed bubble from the "evil, which is apparently out there" and if one were to believe such myths then there would be "a problem." Exploring Abdur-Raheem's reflections, one might speculate about the underlying causes for his differentiating himself from other parents: his social and ethnic background as a teaching professional and Spanish convert to Islam; his insider information as an educator in ZPS; his experiences working in other Muslim and state schools - the possibilities were many. Whatever the underlying reasons for his decision to send his son to Zamzam Primary, Abdur-Raheem saw the Muslim school as a space in which character could be cultivated to "prepare" pupils for "urban life"; the alternative – retreating to "the mountains with some goats and sheep" – was escapist and not a viable option. Moreover, the character building that took place in the Muslim school was a positive feedback loop, a "reinforcement" of good parenting in the home environment.

Mahmoud would also exhibit a pragmatic view of faith and state schooling. In his comments, Mahmoud echoed some of Abdur-Raheem's notions concerning the preparation and protection of children:

So in our case public schooling was a bit of a risk for us in that sense and we said we should take our children to Islamic schooling and if we cannot afford Islamic schooling we just have to do it at home. Um, it doesn't mean that if you take your child to an Islamic school the child is an angel and it doesn't mean if your child has got- goes to a Non-Islamic school, um, the child becomes, you know, the devil. That's not the case. The case is that: you have a friend who has the flu and if you hang around with that friend you would get the flu but a milder version of the flu.

(Interview with researcher, Zamzam Primary School, July 2015)

Mahmoud begins his reflections by problematising “public schooling” as “a bit of a risk” in a way that many parents would, as will be especially evident in the next two sections of chapter 7. However, this risk was not wholesale in the way that Hamud, Vanessa and especially Marwa would depict in their accounts. One might enquire if Mahmoud's peers were more ardent in their critique on account of their own (bad) experiences as parents or as young people negotiating the mainstream system. In Mahmoud's case, home schooling was entertained as an option for educating children – Mahmoud being the sole parent to refer to this as a potential choice (similarly, only one teacher referred to home schooling: Sarah). Again, this might be attributable to the fact that Mahmoud and his wife were well-educated professionals, cognisant of and confident in negotiating mainstream institutions such as schools in a way that many working-class, first-generation Somali parents in the Queensbridge community might not have been, consequently “outsourcing” education to independent schools and/or tuition centres as well as sending their children to madrassas or dugsi – the Somali equivalent. Mahmoud's wife was a woman of Somali-African-American ancestry, educated to Masters level and working as a self-employed graphic designer. Mahmoud was also university-educated with a background in IT, supplementing his work as ZPS administrator by repairing computers. Regardless, Mahmoud and his wife had decided upon “Islamic schooling” for their children, a pragmatic view that avoided some of the binaries expressed in the subjectivities of some of his peers. Employing a vivid angel-devil metaphor, Mahmoud suggested that enrolling one's son or daughter in an “Islamic school” could not guarantee piety, just as attending a state school did not automatically result in corruption – in a manner that seemed to contradict his earlier comments concerning the preservation of innocence. Nevertheless, Mahmoud would imply that exposure to mainstream education was a hazard which could be mitigated against - to a degree – by attendance in a Muslim school. Probing deeper, one might infer from Mahmoud's statements that there is some overlap, either in the ”forms

and processes” of state schools and even faith schools, that results in risk of “contamination” albeit in a “milder” dosage in a Muslim school like Zamzam Primary, such statements indexing the “sanctity” marker on the conservative’s 6-point moral matrix. Teaching participants in Zine’s study on Muslims schools in Canada would also comment that these institutions “minimize the risks” (2008b: 109) as opposed to providing wholesale inoculation. One could posit that Mahmoud also possessed a tempered outlook on such matters because, in essence, the school curriculum and culture of Zamzam Primary were not that dissimilar to the state system.

Whilst Abdur-Raheem and Hamud were tempered in their assessment of a Muslim school such as Zamzam Primary and its state counterparts, one parent articulated a much more polarised world-view. Former PTA-member Marwa explains here her motivations for sending her children to Zamzam Primary:

The reason, erm, for me is quite simple to put them in an Islamic school because I wanted them to have the basis and, er, once we have the basis, when they go to a state school, then at least they know who they are and they’d be more, kind of, er, brought up to defend themselves against any, you know, issues they encounter when they’re in state schools so I thought that was a good way of, er, just building them Islamically and, er, also a way to help the community. We’ve always very much liked to help the community. Er, we could have chosen – as you’ve said – a state school, nothing to pay but I don’t think you’d get the same Islamic background when you do so and we’ve realised that now, when Adnan goes to a state school, even if it’s a primary school, the Islamic chi- the Muslims that are there, they’re not as strong Islamically as he may be.

(Interview with researcher, family home, October 2015)

For Marwa, the Muslim school was a space in which Islamic character could be cultivated. However, unlike other participants, Marwa explicitly addressed the reason for this immersion in religious knowledge: to fortify Muslim children against the ideological onslaught they would inevitably encounter upon entry into an aggressively secular mainstream: those “de-Islamifying forces in public schools and society at large” (Zine, 2009: 39). Marwa’s depiction (at the empirical level) of a siege scenario in which Islam and Muslims were under attack by malign forces, structures and individuals, would feature throughout her interview; it is perhaps unsurprising that her language was defensive (“brought up to defend themselves against any, you know, issues they encounter”). One might speculate that Marwa’s

Islamic ethos and outlook had been shaped by her experiences as an ethnically Portuguese convert born and raised in France, a nation with a secular constitution and policy of assimilation with regards to migrants, minorities and Muslims in particular. Furthermore, such a worldview could have been edified in the Queensbridge community with its conservative (and, to a degree, politicised – as evidenced in the regularity of local and global political issues raised in the Friday sermon,⁴⁰ a phenomenon I was privy to on account of my being present in the building as an employee) interpretation of Islam, closed structures and dense-network ties. Marwa would go on to draw comparisons between her son Adnan – a former pupil of Zamzam Primary now attending a state primary school - and his peers, who had not benefitted from a similar Islamic education (“the Muslims that are there, they’re not as strong Islamically as he may be”). Having “built up” Adnan in his “Islamic background” at ZPS, he now had an advantage over his classmates less apprised in their faith and could withstand secular indoctrination. In her study of Muslim schools in Canada, Zine would also employ a metaphor of construction to frame the thoughts of her teaching participants:

The inculcation of values in a separate and culturally congruent environment was necessary to first build a sense of identity within Muslim children that would then help them integrate into mainstream society without losing their Islamic values and identity.

(Zine, 2009: 50)

Marwa argued that sending her son to a similarly “separate and culturally congruent environment” had inculcated “Islamic values” and a “sense of identity” within him. The last reason Marwa presented for her involvement with Zamzam Primary was a sense of personal obligation to her fellow Muslims – “to help the community.” Perhaps no better testimony to Marwa’s commitment to civic duty was the fact that she and her husband had remained with the school since its inception a decade earlier, contributing their time and help at PTA and governor meetings and charity events.

In this section I have shown how participants identified an Islamic ethos that underpinned teaching and learning in Zamzam Primary. This resulted in an overtly

⁴⁰ One example being the imam’s announcement on 7/7/17 that: “We don’t like Trump.”

Islamic environment that differed noticeably from mainstream schools although more cynical members of the ZPS teaching staff might have disagreed (refer to chapters 5 and 6). This safe space, coupled with the academic excellence parents associated with the institution (although not necessarily in the sight of Ofsted), provided a compelling driver for them to send their children to an educational environment in which they were not exposed to the disorderly conduct and inappropriate language found amongst pupils in the state sector. Whilst some parents exhibited a pragmatic outlook, such as Abdur-Raheem and Mahmoud, others like Marwa presented a more polarised world-view. In the next section, I move from outlook to experience, specifically, parents' own excursions in the state system and how this informed their decision to enrol their children in Zamzam Primary.

7.22 Individual Experiences of State Schools

Many parents I interviewed sought to avoid the problems they associated with state schools by sending their children to Zamzam Primary. Some participants (who had been educated in the UK) recounted their own negative experiences of the mainstream education system as a reason why they would not want their own children to attend a state school, whilst one mother referred to her children's bad experiences specifically.

I start this section by sharing the views of Connor who recalled his time in the state sector:

Went through the experience myself of going through a state school, of being state schooled, and, er, I don't know what the xxx is to the rest of the state schools in the country - it was my secondary school that was pretty, um... but then again, because it was a controversial place itself; the Headmistress who stole half a million pounds but there were other issues on top of that so- regards to that, well, that was playing a part why there were problems there and big classes and erm, weren't really conducive... Thinking that, it might not have been the best kind of opportunity- best kind of environment to put my children in.

(Interview with researcher, Zamzam Primary School, June 2015)

In this extract, Connor avoids wholesale generalisations by differentiating his experiences at his particular state school from others. Nevertheless, he was still somewhat indistinct in his critique of that particular institution ("it was my secondary school that was pretty, um...") other than identifying 'big classes' – an

issue for many mainstream schools. The sole point Connor did raise in any detail was especially anomalous to general shortcomings of the state system: that of embezzlement, thus making it difficult to discern, at this stage at least, what his bad experiences of mainstream education were. Connor's vagueness on this front might be attributable to the fact that I, as a fellow white convert of comparable age and cultural experiences, might anticipate and understand his outlook. He would, however, later articulate a much more precise ideological critique of state schools. In recounting her own experiences of attending a state school, Vanessa would go into greater detail than Connor, perhaps because this was recent history – she was in her early twenties - and thus more salient in her mind:

Vanessa: I- I've got an English mum and I did have an English dad up to a certain point 'till I found out he wasn't my real dad. I was brought up; basically, English and I went to an English school. I didn't enjoy it; I hated it.

Tom: Why was that?

V: Just- I just look at the kids and how they're just, you know, they're friends with, you know, the kids- their friends and they talk about each other and, erm, twist things and, you know, because I had a bad- bad experience and because I can see what it does to the children these days and the swearing, you know, the way they talk, the way they act, boyfriends, girlfriends, all then all the Christmas and Halloween stuff... I said, that's not something I want for my child, you know. I want them to know about it but I don't want them to practise it and I just thought sending them somewhere like that would- was just going to have a bad effect on them.

(Interview with researcher, Zamzam Primary School, November 2015)

Vanessa began her reminiscences by foregrounding identity. Of mixed Turkish and white British ancestry, Vanessa employed the noun "English" to describe her (initial) identity, culture and lifestyle ("I was brought up, basically, English"), growing up in the UK without ever articulating what being and doing "English" was and is. Perhaps this was attributable to my also being "English" (I have found "English" is used in the Queensbridge and other British Muslim communities synonymously and generally, instead of 'white' as a descriptor of ethnic identity) and a Muslim who had also found faith in adulthood. Vanessa's time in an "English school" seemed to have left a powerful impression, and a negative one at that. Again, one might hypothesise that this negative recollection was inherent and embedded, predating an increased observance of Islam. Alternatively, Vanessa's disdain for mainstream schooling might have become more pronounced when observed retrospectively

through the lens of her newfound religious conservatism. Adopting a “processual” view of culture as “dynamic and emergent” (Block, 2006: 22) - less noun more verb – I hold the position that there can be no precise measure of conservatism as “culture arises from the social practices of individuals on a moment-to-moment basis” (ibid). Nevertheless, I will use Vanessa’s stance on celebrating the festivals of other religious groups, coupled with her position on pre-marital sex as a barometer, in part, of her adherence to an orthodox interpretation of Islam and immersion in a religiously conservative community. The matter is obfuscated somewhat when one considers how Vanessa’s concerns with gossip and slandering alongside deceit and treachery might also be frowned upon by parents from a variety of social backgrounds irrespective of faith. Moreover, Vanessa’s grievances with coarse language and particular lifestyle choices (“boyfriends, girlfriends”) are also not necessarily indicative of a commitment to religion. However, when the above critiques are coupled with Vanessa’s concerns about participation in cultural practices that she felt violated her understanding of Islamic doctrine (“all the Christmas and Halloween stuff”), then it appears that a combination of past experience and current ideology underpinned her religious conservatism.

Abdur-Raheem would draw upon his negative experiences working in state schools as a teacher when outlining his rationale for enrolling his son in Zamzam Primary:

I’ve been here eight, ten years. I haven’t seen- they do as told. They do. You tell them go and sit here they do it but they give you this grudge, you know, this look, this face of disgust; they give you all sorts of things, you know, and you’ve failed already if that’s what you’re looking for. The respect is not there.

(Interview with researcher, Zamzam Primary School, June 2015)

In his account, Abdur-Raheem depicted a climate wherein children were afforded excessive liberty resulting in disregard for authority (“You tell them go and sit here they do it but they give you this grudge”) - an unwitting clash between values held by liberals (freedom) and conservatives (authority, loyalty) on Haidt’s 6-point moral matrix (2012). A moral objective of Islamic education – instilling unwavering respect for authority in children - thus appeared incongruent with the ideals of a modern secular democracy, whose freedoms resulted in anti-social behaviour amongst pupils in mainstream schools, not only identified by but also experienced by Vanessa. Abdur-Raheem’s concern seemed to be of individual rights being

prioritised over collective righteousness, thus inspiring the decision to enrol his son in ZPS.

One parent would also cite the state school experience as a motivating factor in enrolling her children in Zamzam Primary; however, she would refer to her children's experiences as opposed to her own. Translating for Umm Ayan, Umm Neimo narrates why her friend enrolled her daughter and two sons in Zamzam Primary:

Umm Neimo: She said, um, because she has an experience with a state school she knows what the child will be like in state school and what the child is like in this school.

Tom: Was that because she studied in a state school?

UN: No. She said two of her children went to state school and she said the behaviours, the language they picked up from the state school she was not happy with them. There was a bad language-

T: Her children were using bad language?

UN: Yeah, they picked up from there she said.

T: Right.

UN: And these things, she said the other two come here, they haven't even got a clue what these are because they have been protected from that type of behaviour and that type of language.

(Interview with researcher, Zamzam Primary School, December 2015)

Like Vanessa, Umm Ayan expressed concerns about conduct and "bad language" - albeit without specifying, "swearing" like Vanessa. Umm Neimo (translating for Umm Ayan) would depict Zamzam Primary as a safe space, one less to do with identity and culture - as previously articulated by teaching participants - but more so on an ideological and moral level. Pupils were "protected" from immorality to the point of obliviousness ("they haven't even got a clue"); their innocence could only be tainted through immersion in the defiled setting of a state school and exposure to its "heterogeneous, foreign or inferior" elements (Duschinsky, 2013: 774). Taking this discussion in isolation, one might infer that not only did Zamzam pupils conduct themselves impeccably, but also they had been shielded from bad behaviour and language entirely, whereas discussions with teachers, especially scorners (such as

Rumaysah and Sumayah), might suggest otherwise. This may have been further evidence of the disconnect between public perception (for example, parents and Queensbridge community members) and insider knowledge (on the part of the institution's employees – teachers) of Zamzam Primary and QIC as a whole. Regardless, it appears that for parents who also worked as educators in ZPS and possessed experience of the British education system, their first-hand familiarity with the shortcomings of state schools had contributed to their embrace of the Islamic independent sector and Zamzam Primary in particular. This outlook was also articulated by parents with no professional involvement in ZPS or Queensbridge Islamic Centre. Accordingly, the consumer had confidence in the piety of the institution (Adelkhah & Keiko, 2011: 8) and its ability to safeguard what they saw as the immanent innocence of their children.

7.23 An Ideological Critique of Mainstream Education

I have shown how parents cited negative experiences – either their own or their children's - of state schooling that contributed to their involvement with Zamzam Primary. Some parents would also provide a general critique of the ideology and methodology of mainstream education that prompted their retreat from the state sector into independent schooling.

On this front, I begin with Hamud, who earlier articulated the (self-imposed) obligation to enrol his daughters in Zamzam Primary. Following probing on my part, Hamud would provide a general critique of state schools that informed his decision:

If you're giving seven year olds sex education for example – I mean it just speaks for itself. You know, they're too young, they're – they shouldn't be taught these things. And the only reason why these things are being taught is because of social problems in democratic countries. If you make, you know, lust and desires prominent in society you're gonna be confronted now we have to teach our children young as six or seven to know about sex, to know about, er, diseases and all of this stuff and not to say that the children here are perfect, you know, but there you don't what child is coming from what home and broken families and, you know, these sorts of things and they all bring this to school and teach their friends and they look at that and take what they can and leave what they want.

(Interview with researcher, Zamzam Primary School, June 2015)

Hamud articulated a position that appears to be somewhere between the scepticism of the scorner and the unquestioning commitment of the true believer. Whilst

conceding that Zamzam students were not “perfect,” he contrasted the Muslim school environment with “there.” Did Hamud refer to the state sector with an adverbial because he was talking in generalities; because his words would be implicitly understood or was the mere mention of mainstream schools by name taboo or distasteful? Deeper analysis of our discussion suggests Hamud’s critique of the mainstream was largely one of sexual politics, thus indexing the liberty and sanctity markers on the conservative’s 6-point moral matrix (Haidt, 2012). Hamud began his critique by outlining the issue of sex education as axiomatic (“it just speaks for itself”) before expanding upon his specific criticisms: six or seven year olds were just “too young” to learn about “these things.” Whilst initially alluding to what “these things” were, Hamud would then address them more directly: “lust”, “desire”, “sex” and “diseases” in a sequential order, intended or coincidental, suggestive of emotion influencing actions and outcomes. Moreover, Hamud hinted at an undetermined agency being responsible for the salience of sex in the mainstream (“If you make, you know, lust and desires prominent in society”) and for blowback, prompting the need for sex education (“now we have to teach our children young as six or seven”) to offset unwanted outcomes of liberal lifestyles (“the only reason why these things are being taught is because of social problems in democratic countries”). Thus, in the relatively safe space of Zamzam Primary, Hamud’s children could avoid pernicious influences (“they all bring this to school and teach their friends”) that might be present in a less rigorously regulated mainstream school attended by children from unsavoury social backgrounds, propagating lifestyles contrary to his understanding of Islam.

Vanessa would echo her husband’s analysis of the hazards of exposure to an ideology and lifestyle that countered their Islamic practices. Her children were safe in Zamzam Primary:

I don’t want them going to state school. I don’t want them talking about boyfriends and kissing and Christmas and Halloween and talking about all this stuff that- and then wanting it ‘cause it seems so attractive because everybody else is doing it. I want them to be brought up properly and not be, you know, erm, hypnotised by all that, you know- all that stuff.

(Interview with researcher, Zamzam Primary School, November 2015)

As noted earlier, Vanessa could draw upon her own negative experiences of “English schooling” to reinforce her critique of the state sector. Again, cultural celebrations (“Christmas and Halloween”⁴¹) and recreational pursuits (“boyfriends and kissing”) were highlighted as contravening Islamic orthodoxy. The power of talk alone was sufficient to ensnare Muslim innocents and tempt them into emulating irreligious peers (“everybody else is doing it”) in illicit pursuits, on account of their allure. Whilst Christmas and Halloween were not celebrated at Zamzam Primary, it would be interesting (albeit a potential incendiary action) to investigate if these occasions were discussed amongst pupils alongside “boyfriends and kissing” too.

Sami would also address illicit relationships as being part and parcel of life in the state sector - unlike in Muslim schools - when talking about his own son’s experiences:

He come to me and said, you know, Abi, at school they’re talking about girlfriends and boyfriends, it’s not correct. I’m sure, I spoke to him, but I’m sure in school they told him a hundred times, okay, about this so if he didn’t go to the school he will go to the nursery, he will go to the pri- for him, it is normal, at the secondary school it’s normal because he saw his whole life. For five years, he saw it’s normal but it’s not normal at home because- but it’s normal outside so it is important.

(Interview with researcher, family home, October 2015)

Having been socialised into Islamic orthodoxy, Sami’s son Ishaq had an activated sanctity marker on his conservative’s 6-point moral matrix and thus saw relationships outside of marriage as problematic (“at school they’re talking about girlfriends and boyfriends, it’s not correct”). Moreover, Ishaq had internalised these values imparted by his parent and reinforced by his Muslim school, ZPS (“I’m sure in school they told him a hundred times”). However, his father felt that if Ishaq had attended a state school he would have been inducted into a lifestyle that would see this as an acceptable norm, (“at the secondary school it’s normal because he saw his whole life”).

⁴¹ A participant in Zine’s studies of three Muslim schools in Canada would also cite similar cultural celebrations when describing how minority youth in mainstream spaces are more concerned with conforming to the traditions of the dominant culture than adhering to their own: “They all act that one culture, they all act that one Canadian, typical Christmas, Halloween, whatever” (2008b: 113).

Like his fellow participants, Connor identified sexual politics as an issue of contention, albeit in greater detail at both an ideological and practical level:

Also other issues in terms of we're in that post '60s sexual revolution and many things that are traditional we're not taking it as given- well, not "we" but certain people or, they might be small numbers, but they might be very vocal in questioning these things and pushing past these bounds. Certain things I can agree on, racism, for example, a tradition that was somehow practised and not necessarily a good thing. Things like issues of morality and certain, erm, practices in society at least; so I know that, they wouldn't be pushed here or they wouldn't be- the teacher wouldn't try to hijack his or her role and be an outlet for that, for example, so that was another thing I had here. I didn't want that kind of brainwashing, I didn't want those radical views being – well, maybe not so radical now, but – being pushed by certain groups for the past thirty, forty years. I didn't want my child having to be in such an environment.

(Interview with researcher, Zamzam Primary School, June 2015)

In the extract above, Connor appears to implicitly acknowledge the power and influence that teachers wield in their position and a responsibility that comes with it (i.e. not wanting a teachers to "hijack his or her role"). This view seemed very much in line with the DfE's teaching standards and not the first time Connor had expressed an almost establishment position regarding aspects of schooling; for example, Connor would also lend credence to the verdicts of Ofsted inspectors elsewhere in our interview. Connor then cites the "60's sexual revolution" as a Rubicon moment in which traditional values – which he never explicitly articulated – were challenged and changed. Some aspects of these post 60's cultural changes would be congruent with Connor's own world-view, for example, a greater awareness of the injustices of racial bigotry - a topic of concern perhaps considering Connor was married to a British-Somali woman (who would go on to work in the school nursery starting in the 2017/18 academic year), their children being of mixed race heritage. However, other "practices in society" since that time proved to be problematic "pushing past these bounds"- again, without explicitly articulating what these "radical views" were. One might wonder if Connor held such views prior to his conversion or had they developed as he became committed to his faith as a member of a "textual community" (Fox, 1994). Whatever the rationale behind his thinking, Connor felt certain (sexual) lifestyles would not be valorised and promoted in the safe space of Zamzam Primary ("I know that, they wouldn't be pushed").

Whilst many parents expressed grievances about non-faith schools and especially the proliferation and promotion of what they deemed to be illicit relationships, one parent, Aaqib, would depict the state sector in slightly different terms to his peers. Aaqib's daughter Zubaida had attended Zamzam Primary but now studied at a mainstream secondary where – like Zara had earlier suggested - her peers were neglectful of prayer. Nevertheless, as an educator himself, Aaqib felt equipped and empowered to engage with the school to support his daughter's religious requirements:

When I was spoke to the Head he was saying to me Zubaida needs to ask; if Zubaida asks he can give her a place to pray during her lunch break or whatever it's not an issue, as long as she takes that step and that's because she feels shy, she feels I'm the only one, there's no-one else, there's other Muslims: why are they not praying, why should I be?

(Interview with researcher, Zamzam Primary School, July 2015)

In Aaqib's account, the state school was presented in slightly more sympathetic terms. Whilst not a religious environment, practitioners were sufficiently considerate and compassionate in accommodating the needs of Muslim pupils that were protected by school policy (a downwards configurational cause), albeit with an agency required on the part of pupils (an upwards normative cause) – something Samir had asserted earlier (chapter 5.4). Marwa would also acknowledge similar circumstances albeit with a caveat:

I think it's quite important but obviously some state schools are- permit people to actually do prayers, they have a prayer room it does- they don't have that. They did something for Ramadan, they did allocate a room for Ramadan, but outside Ramadan they don't actually allocate any rooms so the pupils have to look around for rooms and it's not very easy to find some. Erm, so the first thing- they know, when they get home, that's the first thing they have to do so yes, family's very important, erm, but obviously you have to keep them going to Islamic schools as well, like madrassas, just to keep that balance.

(Interview with researcher, family home, October 2015)

In her experience sending her older children to state schools, there was limited provision to accommodate prayer, although largely confined to the holy month of Ramadan. Nevertheless, for Marwa, Muslim schools and madrassas had an important role to play in the cultivation and preservation of Muslim children, as did family.

In this section, I have identified parental concerns with what they perceived to be the ideology and methodology of the British educational system. Of particular concern to parents were the freedoms (especially sexual) afforded to citizens of a modern liberal secular democracy, that might be openly addressed by practitioners and enjoyed by pupils in state schools. Participation in the rites and rituals of other faith groups was also deemed problematic and a contravention of Islamic fundamentals. By sending their children to Zamzam Primary, participants felt pupils would not be exposed to beliefs and lifestyles that contravened an Islamic ethical framework, as they understood it. Intriguingly, many parents who articulated grievances with the philosophy and practices of mainstream schooling had either been educated or worked in the state sector and perhaps possessed first hand knowledge of its inner workings, unlike other ZPS parents, especially those whose formative years might have been spent abroad. Conversely, two parents suggested that state schools did accommodate the needs of Muslim pupils to a degree, but both had still chosen to educate their children in Muslim primary schools.

7.3 Parents and Pupils' Positive Experiences of Zamzam Primary

Parents' positive experiences of ZPS outlined here link very much back to the previous two chapters and, more specifically, research question 2.2 which explored the reasons why participants sent their children to a Muslim school. Looking back to chapter 7.21 one might recall that parents articulating their reasons for enrolling their children in ZPS included a desire to marry academic excellence with spiritual growth; this was facilitated by the environment and atmosphere alongside what was taught in ZPS and how, as articulated below.

7.31 An Intimate and Inclusive yet Exclusive Environment

A number of parents and former pupils would describe in detail their positive experiences of Zamzam Primary. The "Islamicness of the institution", coupled with its small size and compassionate teachers, contributed to an almost family-like atmosphere in which Muslim children received attentive support. Hamda's enthusiastic celebration of ZPS as a place where her two boys were "happy," "safe" and "belong here", would be shared by a number of parents. Vanessa would be equally effusive:

Pros? They're in the masjid. They get to pray in the masjid. It's basically a part of them. You know, their school is in the masjid so that- that is what I like: they get to pray in Jammah; they get to see the Imam maybe sometimes; also, they're surrounded by all Muslim boys and girls, that's what I love as well...

The- obviously, I know the teachers personally anyway so I feel like I have a bit more of an insight with my child as well. I'm not on the outside, I'm on the inside and, erm, what else? My husband works here (laughs)! I don't know what else to say! (Laughs.)

(Interview with researcher, Zamzam Primary School, November 2015)

Vanessa begins with a practical observation: Zamzam Primary was part of the larger QIC mosque complex; in fact, school classrooms were used during Friday prayers (a phenomenon also found in "School A" in Breen's ethnography of Muslim schools, 2009) and Ramadan, when demands on space were greater on account of increased number of worshippers in attendance. Moreover, during weekdays, children transitioned from the school to the mosque to perform their congregational prayers at lunchtime ("they get to pray in Jammah"), a procedure (later rescinded to meet Ofsted safeguarding requirements) Vanessa was well acquainted with as a member of staff. Vanessa also shared a fascinating image of internalisation: children imbibed the sanctity of the space they inhabited ("It's basically a part of them"). Furthermore, by virtue of studying in such close proximity to the mosque, pupils were afforded opportunities to interact with influential and inspirational figures in the Queensbridge community ("they get to see the imam maybe sometimes"). Adding to her list of positives, Vanessa referred to the company her children kept as part of an exclusively Muslim school community ("they're surrounded by all Muslim boys and girls"). When Vanessa's statements above are coupled with her comments in previous chapters, one might infer that a homogenous student body was an essential component of a moral economy that effectively policed and outlawed the sort of behaviour (found in state schools) that might contravene her faith values. For example, "You're not going to get talk about boyfriends and girlfriends and that kind of stuff, maybe on the odd occasion but in general it's, you know, that stuff's not mentioned." Vanessa then echoed Jamal, who had earlier described how he sent his daughter to ZPS because of his familiarity with school and staff as a QIC employee. Vanessa experienced a similar set of circumstances as employee and parent, her relationship with her colleagues ("I know the teachers personally anyway") an exemplification of the dense network ties between school staff and the wider

Queensbridge community. Vanessa enjoyed and appreciated this familiarity and conviviality - unlike A'rfa for example - in that it enabled her to know the particulars of her two daughters' education and emotional well being ("I feel like I have a bit more of an insight with my child"). Vanessa's closing remarks again reflect the reality of a close-knit faith community: Vanessa and her husband Hamud were active members of the Queensbridge network, centred around its mosque; were both employees of its school and sent their children there too.

In Zine's study of Muslim schools in Canada, many students felt such institutions enjoyed "more of a safe and comfortable environment for Muslim pupils than did the public schools" (2009: 46). More specifically, students in Florida Islamic School would celebrate its "sense of community," "family-like atmosphere" and the "safety they felt in the school's Islamic environment" (Martinez, 2012: 76). A 15-year old girl in Niehaus's study of a British Muslim school would similarly assert: "I like my school because we are all of the same religion, we all feel equal and nobody is ashamed or shy of practising their religion" (2011: 22). Shams would also refer to the safe space of Zamzam Primary as a positive. In the extract below he has just compared his experiences attending a state primary and ZPS, favouring the latter on account of its "Muslim environment", which he would explain in more detail:

I'm a Muslim, obviously, being in a Muslim environment is something that is at ease with you; so you feel more comfortable in an environment that reflects your belief so you're able to see Muslim teachers that obviously could impact your religion in a good way as well as teaching you basic curriculum and natural studies. It's really good!

(Interview with researcher, Zamzam Primary School, July 2015)

Shams starts by describing his immersion in a "Muslim environment", although elsewhere he would refer to Zamzam Primary as an "Islamic environment," using the terms interchangeably. The sense of ease savoured by Shams in a "Muslim environment" that "reflects your belief" had also been shared earlier by some members of teaching staff, most notably Sabrina and A'rfa. Shams then went on to identify the importance of having accessible role models one can relate to on account of shared faith ("you're able to see Muslim teachers that obviously could impact your religion in a good way"), thus inspiring greater accomplishments. Just as Zine's

student participants praised plurality (2009), Shams would describe the diversity of his particular Muslim school as a positive:

I think because the actual school was run by different types of people so there wasn't as the other school, it was Asians; there was a black head teacher, an Asian deputy; you have all these different things that, um, that all sort of ice broke everything and it was all just about Islam that it's all acted but in that type of school, everything falls back to their original principles.

(Interview with researcher, Zamzam Primary School, July 2015)

Whilst Vanessa had described Zamzam Primary as an exclusively Muslim environment, Shams noted there was ethnic and cultural diversity within this religious homogeneity. Drawing a favourable comparison to his racially monolithic Muslim secondary school (which he would later leave due to experiencing racism as one of a handful of ethnically Somali pupils there⁴²), Shams praised the myriad ethnicities amongst teaching staff (“there was a black head teacher, an Asian deputy”) that made for a welcoming environment rooted in a monolithic and “true Islam” (Miah, 2015: 113) that had not strayed true from its roots (“everything falls back to their original principles”), as articulated by other participants as “Qur'an and Sunnah.” This fortuitous set of circumstances appeared to be attributable to both normative upward causes (communal interaction) and downwards configurational causes (recruitment selection) in Shams's account.

Fatima would also allude to the safe and friendly environment found - in her experience – in Muslim schools:

Fatima: There'd be a lot more bullying and harassment in state schools than Islamic schools.

Tom: Go on.

F: So it's better off to go to an Islamic school than a state school.

T: OK.

F: They're less likely to do anything; the schools are larger so it'd go unnoticed.

(Interview with researcher, UCL Institute of Education, July 2015)

⁴² Martinez would also unearth examples of racial discrimination against non-Arab students in her study of the predominantly Arab “Florida Islamic School” (2012).

Fatima's opening lines suggest a not entirely confident assertion on account of her use of "there'd be." This reads more hypothetically than a documentation of what occurs at the actual level, perhaps because Fatima had spent a considerable portion of her school career in faith schools and had less experience of the state sector, especially as an older child and now teenager. Moreover, perhaps she had never experienced bullying so could not comment categorically on the matter. Nevertheless, Ayan would add credibility to Fatima's remarks concerning the absence of bullying in ZPS:

You have a closer bond with friends and it's not like a big – you don't have as much problems such as bullying and stuff that happens in other- bigger schools and things like that.

(Interview with researcher, Zamzam Primary School, July 2016)

It appears that Zamzam Primary's small size - a downwards configurational cause on account of proprietorial decision-making regarding building choice and layout, as well as managerial policies on admissions - played a substantial role in creating an atmosphere of respect and affability. Similarly, individual interactions amongst pupils could be seen to be an upwards normative cause for an amicable institutional ambience. Ishaq, from the same year group as Fatima, would also describe Zamzam Primary's intimate environment as conducive to teaching and learning, unlike mainstream institutions. In the extract below – taken from an interview where his mother (Marwa) and father (Sami) were present - he reflects upon the positives he extracted from his time at ZPS:

Ishaq: In state schools you wouldn't know everyone straight away; there'd be a lot of hostility between class members.

Tom: Oh, really?

I: There's always one person that would stick out the most and there'd be certain people that'd be pushed down and under pressure from all the other students so you'd be trying to learn something but you'd also be a target for flying paper aeroplanes across the room and stuff like that. While in Zamzam, everyone knew each other. Everyone was friendly so the learning environment was much higher. You could learn what you want without, yeah, being afraid of being targeted by anything.

(Interview with researcher, family home, October 2015)

In this extract, Ishaq identifies a link between environment and its impact upon individual agency, specifically, a pupil's ability to learn. Ishaq presented Zamzam Primary as an intimate and harmonious space. These amicable daily interactions could be understood as upwards normative causes conducive to unrestricted study, (although he later suggests otherwise, as we shall see), with ZPS acting as a microcosm perhaps for the wider Queensbridge community. He then contrasted ZPS with an essentialised depiction of the state sector as a whole, an impersonal ("In state schools you wouldn't know everyone straight away") and belligerent ("there'd be a lot of hostility between class members") arena beset by isolation (There's always one person that would stick out the most") and bullying ("there's be certain people that'd be pushed down and under pressure from all the other students"). Ishaq's somewhat binary representation of Zamzam Primary versus mainstream education establishments might have lacked balance, but was grounded in his experience of having attended both a faith and state school. Were his words to be unpicked further, one might infer that he had perhaps been the object of his classmates' tyranny. This is particularly evident in Ishaq's shift from the impersonal ("There's always one person... there'd be certain people that'd be pushed down") to second person pronoun ("you'd be trying to learn something but you'd also be a target" – my emphasis) in describing "hostility between class members." What is especially interesting about these accounts that praise Zamzam Primary's intimate environment is that other participants saw the same space as potentially problematic, on account of the blurred boundaries between teachers and the wider community. Perhaps this was more of an issue for mature professionals striving to maintain a work-life balance, as opposed to teenagers and young people eager to fit in with their peers and wider faith community. I conclude with brief words from Ubbah to segue into the next section, as she reflects upon the welcoming, almost intimate environment and family atmosphere in ZPS, enjoyed by her son:

You know it's different. Abdi, when he is here is like, you know, a big family, you know why? Uncle, aunty, is teachers. When you go there is different and kids is different is coming different- school is huge than this one.

(Interview with researcher, Zamzam Primary School, October 2015)

7.32 Small Classes Conducive to Study

In chapter 7.31, participants described Zamzam Primary as an intimate and inclusive environment in which pupils could feel part of a faith community with its accompanying shared experiences, ideals and culture. As a corollary to the above, some participants would report that this intimacy and amity actually aided learning, with small class sizes contributing further. For example, Connor would note that “private schools have smaller classes” when explaining why he and his wife chose to send their children to a Muslim school like Zamzam Primary. Umm Neimo would express a similar position when articulating why she sent her daughter to ZPS: “the school is, er, a small school my children will get, er, the way I believe more attention than a huge school where there will be thirty pupils in a classroom.”

Moving from parents to pupils, Ayan would share her thoughts on how Zamzam Primary’s intimate environment contributed to a climate of conviviality. In the next extract, she suggests that small classes assisted in teaching and learning:

Ayan: It was much smaller and everyone knew each other and you had like a more-not like more connection but you could talk to your teachers more because you knew them more. The teachers worked with a smaller amount of pupils so it wasn’t like as big and full and busy.

Tom: How did you know the teachers better in ZPS than a state school?

A: Because the classes were small and you’d get to speak to teachers and you’d get help easier and quicker cause there’s not more students.

(Interview with researcher, Zamzam Primary School, July 2016)

For Ayan, small classes meant teachers and pupils enjoyed closer relationships, resulting in speedier support being provided to students.

Shams would add credibility to Ayan’s viewpoint when also articulating his thoughts on this topic, drawing upon his own experiences of the state and faith sectors as he praised the small classes in Zamzam Primary:

In a state school, the amount of people- there’s so many people you have a lot less one to one with teachers and there’s, um, there’s less time specifically for students that may need help and there’s a constant thing of really wanting the teacher to help you cause xxx you get really frustrated when the teachers not there to help you and you really need it, you’re sitting there and you don’t understand. But when I came to

a Muslim school, the classes are a lot smaller, there's more teachers to help me out. I understood the work a lot more and it's a Muslim environment.

(Interview with researcher, Zamzam Primary School, July 2015)

Shams would observe that class sizes were bigger in mainstream schools, resulting in less support for pupils ("there's so many people you have a lot less one to one with teachers"), especially for those most in need ("there's less time specifically for students that may need help"). As a consequence, pupils become exasperated with the confusion and helplessness they felt ("you're sitting there and you don't understand"). Shams depiction of this state of affairs suggests certain passivity on the part of pupils and, as a corollary, that it was the teacher's duty to be suitably alert to the needs of his or her students and proactive in providing assistance. Such notions were also expressed in Evans's ethnography of an urban Jamaican school wherein students highlighted the importance and even expectation of "teaching for understanding" (2006: 58). Shams went on to contrast the teaching practises in the state sector with the supportive educative culture (again deemed important by Evans's participants) found in the Muslim school, wherein the size of a class directly contributed to individual comprehension in lessons. Interestingly, Shams then proposed that there were more teachers in ZPS - the accuracy of this statement is certainly open to debate. Zamzam Primary, at the time of writing, employed 15 members of staff and had over 100 pupils on roll (including the nursery) with no class containing more than 20 pupils. One can unpick Shams's subjectivity by searching for a figurative interpretation: perhaps Shams alluded to small classes creating an impression of there being "more teachers", even though on the actual level there were fewer educators in ZPS than in a state setting. Accordingly, this explanation of a psychological causal mechanism for Shams's representation of events in the empirical level allows us to understand how he enjoyed greater support in Zamzam Primary without giving credence to numerical discrepancies at the actual level. Lastly, Shams concluded his remarks by referring to a "Muslim environment"; as noted earlier, he would also use "Islamic environment", suggesting the two expressions were interchangeable. Having heard from participants regarding the physicality and demographic make-up of the institution that gave it a welcoming and supportive atmosphere, I now share the views of parents and pupils concerning those teachers working within ZPS and how they contributed to its pull factor.

7.33 Murabbis: Compassionate Educators

Before hearing from parents and pupils concerning staff at ZPS, I briefly explore a traditional Islamic concept of teaching. When discussing his own teaching practice, former ZPS trainee teacher Adil would describe the role of a teacher as a “murabbi” meaning a cultivator:

In the early days of Islam which people would relate to, the cultivator of the children was not the parent; it was someone called a “murabbi” – they would send them to someone and they would have that- i.e., they were role models in the community and that’s what a teacher needs to be, a role model.

(Interview with researcher, Zamzam Primary School, October 2015)

In his brief reflection, Adil evoked an idyllic Islamic past (similar to Hamud’s earlier referencing of the Ottoman Empire) in which parenting roles were defined differently to today. The teacher, as opposed to the parent, helped develop a child’s character – the manners and morals so enthusiastically espoused by Hamud earlier – and on account of this, would be respected individuals in society (“they were role models in the community”).

In Martinez’s study of Florida Islamic School, participants would draw connections between affection and academic success (2012). Parents and pupils in Zamzam Primary shared this sentiment, arguing that teaching staff cared more about their pupils than their counterparts in mainstream schools. I start with Vanessa’s reflections:

I don’t know, I just feel like the teachers- they’re a lot more, you know, caring and, you know, they guide them well. They teach them manners, there’s- there’s morals and in like state school, I just- obviously I don’t know now, I feel the teachers, they’re not so, um – how I put it – emotionally connected with their kids and they don’t actually see what’s going on.

They don’t actually pay attention to what’s going on because, for instance, here: If a child’s off- If Hanna’s a bit off one day, the teacher will tell me. She’ll know. She’ll pick up on that. But in a state school they would- well, when I was at school, they don’t really pick up on them sort of things.

(Interview with researcher, Zamzam Primary School, November 2015)

As noted in chapter 7.22, Vanessa would repeatedly cite her own negative experiences and those of family members attending state schools as one of a number of reasons for enrolling her daughters in Zamzam Primary. In this extract, a similar

theme emerges. Vanessa began by identifying another common thread: the moral economy of Zamzam Primary, in which adab and akhlaq were imparted by inspirational and compassionate practitioners (“the teachers- they’re a lot more, you know, caring”) cognisant of their religious and professional duty to cultivate character (“they guide them well. They teach them manners, there’s- there’s morals”). In identifying a distance between teachers and pupils in mainstream settings, Vanessa perhaps inadvertently reinforced the notion of the Queensbridge community being particularly close-knit. Moreover, not only was there a disconnect between teacher and pupil in the state sector, but practitioners lacked sufficient compassion, alertness (“They don’t actually pay attention to what’s going on”) and skills of communication – unlike the educators in ZPS (“If Hanna’s a bit off one day, the teacher will tell me”). Vanessa’s portrayal of state schools in the empirical level was somewhat broad and polarised, but one might comprehend her subjectivity further by understanding it as being rooted in events at the actual level: her own negative experiences as a young person acting as a psychological causal mechanism, as she acknowledged:

A lot of times through primary school and my secondary school I was just miserable cause it was just all about that education, learning things.

(Interview with researcher, Zamzam Primary School, November 2015)

In discussing ethnographies of schools, Erickson describes the American anthropologist Malinowski’s model of social behaviour as a form of exchange:

The classroom can be seen as an economic system of behavior — a political economy — in which students offer deference to the teacher in exchange for kind treatment and the purveying of knowledge.

(Erickson, 1984: 54)

Unsurprisingly, “kind treatment” at the hands of teachers and its connection to the “purveying of knowledge” figured prominently in pupil accounts of school life. As Vanessa did before him, Ishaq would also paint an unflattering portrait of teaching and learning in mainstream settings in which exchanges were imbalanced, hierarchical and open to abuse:

Some teachers in our school, as well, they wouldn’t teach you cause they like it. It’s like they become a teacher just for the holidays so they’d teach you but if you did one thing wrong, you didn’t answer a question straight away, they’d threaten you

and take you out of the class so that's taking your education time just for personal issues of theirs.

(Interview with researcher, family home, October 2015)

For Ishaq, teachers in state schools were disinvested in their work (“they wouldn’t teach you cause they like it”) and punitive in punishing pupils, (“if you did one thing wrong... they’d threaten you and take you out of the class”), enacting unjust retribution as a valve for their own personal frustrations, that had significant consequences for students’ learning (“that’s taking your education time”). Ishaq then segued from pupil disenchantment in the state sector to depicting a more harmonious environment in ZPS:

While in Zamzam, the teachers there would teach you because they wanted to teach so instead of taking you out of the class they’d move you to an empty seat or something so you’d have no-one to talk to and cause you’re so bored you’d focus more on the lesson itself than other people.

(Interview with researcher, family home, October 2015)

In the above extract, Ishaq voices views similar to the young people in Evans’s study of a Jamaican high school: participants wanted to be taught by caring practitioners who believed in their students and were “encouraging and motivating” (2006: 60). Here, Ishaq attributes agency to Zamzam employees (“the teachers there would teach you because they wanted to teach”); there was a genuine desire to teach - a confirmation of the enthusiasm expressed earlier by participants in explaining their individual calls to teaching. Ishaq then outlined some of the minutiae of behaviour management in the contemporary classroom: sanctions might be imposed from top-down by Zamzam Primary’s teachers (“they’d move you to an empty seat”) but the end objective was always to create a space conducive to teaching and learning (“you’d focus more on the lesson itself than other people”). Exchanges between teachers and pupils in ZPS were hierarchical yet predicated upon kind and just treatment that ultimately facilitated the purveying of knowledge. The contrast between the two spaces could not be more different.

Lastly, I share the views of Umm Ayan. Her friend Umm Neimo translates for her peer in drawing comparison between teachers in state and Muslim schools:

Umm Neimo: She said, um, from her personal experience, she said, um, the way she feels from the teachers in this school and the teachers she has met in the other school- her children attended two different state schools-

Tom: Okay.

UN: She said the chances she gets from the teachers in this school is way a lot.

T: Really?

UN: She can see them any time she feels like, if not today, tomorrow, she gets to see them. Whichever teacher she wants to speak about her child's progress and she said, um, she didn't get that opportunity and she said even like during the parent's evening in this school she gets a full on report where she will be told your child's weaknesses are this and your child's strengths are this so maybe we can work on these weaknesses to bring them up to the level but um, she said, during the time her child was attending state school she said, um, she received a very limited information. Yeah, your child is where they should be and that's all I can say and she said I felt like I had to force the information out of the teachers to expand a bit more on what I needed to hear. That's what she said.

UA: (Speaking in Somali.)

UN: She said, even though- she said this school is private school, I have to pay she said, she said one of the reasons- one of the things that made me choose, she said, is how things are explained to me and how I'm supported- to support my child, like, your child needs such a book to practise at home and she said, um, the confusion between the environment at school and the environment at home. She said it felt like we were telling them two different things.

(Interview with researcher, Zamzam Primary School, December 2015)

For Umm Ayan, the teachers in Zamzam Primary differed from those in state schools in that they were more attentive and accessible ("She can see them any time she feels like"). Information about children's attainment and the steps required to improve their academic understanding were communicated clearly, unlike their time in state schools where they "received a very limited information", causing "confusion between the environment at school and the environment at home." In this extract, Umm Ayan – via her translator – articulated some of the jargon of contemporary schooling with references to success, strength and weaknesses, recalling Swain's earlier observations (2001). She also echoed Ishaaq and Vanessa's assertions that Zamzam teachers were more compassionate and caring, thus fulfilling the role of the murabbi as outlined by Adil at the start of this chapter.

7.34 Akhlaq: Cultivated Character

As previously noted, many participants perceived the Muslim school to be a space in which manners and morals could be cultivated amongst their children. Whilst this could be merely an ideal, a number of parents in this section argue that it had actually worked in practice for her children. I begin with comments from Abu Fatima:

Tom: Have there been any other positive outcomes for your children regarding their involvement in Zamzam Primary School?

Abu Fatima: There's lots of positives. The main character is Fatima. She is definitely a better person.

T: Really?

AF: Because we learn from her every now and then some good Islamic directions and she is now- because she was in Zamzam, alhamdulillah, she goes to Khadijah Secondary now.

(Interview with researcher, Zamzam Primary School, November 2015)

In this extract, Abu Fatima asserts that his daughter's enrolment in Zamzam Primary, even just for the two years she attended, made a significant impact upon her character. Not only was Fatima a "better person", her immersion in an Islamic environment resulted in increased religious knowledge that benefitted her family ("we learn from her every now and then some good Islamic directions") and gave her a focus in life that prepared her for the demands of secondary school and beyond ("Coming to Zamzam Primary School did help and does help the choice of study, quality of study and choice of working direction").

Marwa would also testify how their time in ZPS had had a positive effect on her children's character:

Tom: How has the experience of attending a Muslim primary shaped your children and their entry into the mainstream state sector?

Marwa: Um, regarding morals and character, I think it's done them good, actually, very good. They know who they are, they know they're Muslims, they know what they can do when they go to a state school. Er, they know that they can't eat this, that, er, you know, they- also, their behaviour towards teachers and students is quite different from when you see the state school pupils and the way they behave with the teachers and things. Erm, they know the importance of Islam, it's something they always keep in mind and when they learn something about other religions they

always relate it to Islam as well. They say- and they can, even in school, if they hear something that is not right they'll say: that's not the way it is. Er, so I think it's done them good.

Sami: Ishaq, what do you want to say?

Marwa: What do you think it's done for you, Ishaq?

Ishaq: Um, well, being in a Muslim school has actually helped cause as you said in- you don't really get lost in the, all, character of the other pupils cause the people in state schools, there's groups of people that everyone looks up to in every year and most people try to be like them so they change their character and they change their personality to be like them but that's cause that's how they've been since they've been younger in primary state schools so they've always looked up to a set of certain people. In Muslim schools there's- you just look up to a- the role model which is The Prophet and you don't really have to- you don't really have any set groups, it's just everyone is even. There's no-one treated more or less while in state schools there's always some people that will be treated higher than you and yeah, so, being in a Muslim school you know who you are. You wouldn't change your personality to be with other people because you haven't changed it for years so you wouldn't find the need to do it.

(Interview with researcher, family home, October 2015)

Marwa begins with a positive. Enrolment in ZPS ensured her children were in touch with their religious identity and heritage ("they know they're Muslims") and what this entailed at the actual level ("they know that they can't eat this" – supporting Connor's earlier reference to halal food as an important topic for some of my participants) especially when transitioning into the mainstream ("they know what they can do when they go to a state school"). This would be contrasted with those less versant in faith later on in the interview:

We've seen a lot of secondary schools where, especially girls, they wear the hijab when they go in, as soon as they're inside they take off the hijab and they behave like normal students, you know.

(Interview with researcher, family home, October 2015)

In this brief comment, faith is gendered in public spaces and reduced to the wearing of modest dress with Marwa appearing to reproduce the "pious Muslim girl" archetype as an ideal. Zine notes:

This discourse is rooted in largely conservative and patriarchal views of Muslim women's identity. It emphasizes the extrinsic elements of faith, such as the dress code, and regulates them according to conservative cultural norms.

(Zine, 2008a: 40-41)

Zine describes such “cultural codes of conduct” that act as “legal narratives that frame the actions and interactions” of Muslim girls and women as a “public performance of piety” (2008a: 41). Marwa had perhaps reproduced this “canonical discourse” (2008a: 40) or was merely providing an expedient but underdeveloped example in the empirical level to explain “double culture syndrome” (Zine, 2008a: 47) - an experience described as a “twin role” by a participant in Breen’s ethnography of Muslim schools (2009: 116). Rumaysah had also earlier (chapter 6.43) referred to a time “right at the start of the school” when “all the sisters were niqabis except for me”, indicating a (perceived) greater religiosity on the part of practitioners manifest in their choice of clothing. Returning to the initial extract, Marwa clarified that this cultivation of character bore fruit in children’s conduct, especially their interactions with elders. This was on account of their faith being an anchor in their lives and ever prominent in their thinking, thus enabling them to engage with people from different backgrounds (“when they learn something about other religions they always relate it to Islam as well”). This form of contrasting extended beyond pluralistic relativity, rather, it empowered young people to make concrete decisions about right and wrong when encountering and interacting with alternate world views (“if they hear something that is not right they’ll say: that’s not the way”).

Following prompting from his parents, Ishaq suggested that the environment of the Muslim school enabled the pupil to be his or herself in a way that they might not be able to do so in the mainstream sector (“you don’t really get lost in the, all, character of the other pupils”); one might propose that this could equally be attributable to the size of a school as opposed to it being orienteered in faith. Ishaq’s description of the social hierarchy in state schools is a familiar motif in both the worlds of education and entertainment (“there’s groups of people that everyone looks up”) resulting in adaptation to fit in (“they change their personality to be like them”). Ishaq then contrasted the above with a depiction of Muslim schools that appeared somewhat romanticised but very real for him in his accounts. Pupils revered the Messenger of God - the central heroic ancestor in the creation myth of Islam (Erickson, 1984) - as opposed to secular celebrities (“you just look up to a- the role model which is The Prophet”), whilst the playing field was levelled (“it’s just everyone is even”) and not dominated by particular cliques. This harmonious state of affairs was attributable

once again to having a firm foundation established on faith, that affirmed identity (“being in a Muslim school you know who you are”) in the long term without necessitating adaptation (“You wouldn’t change your personality”). Such an uplifting outlook corroborates Ishaq’s earlier reflections upon the positive time he spent in Zamzam Primary.

In this section I have presented accounts from parents and pupils concerning the positives of Zamzam Primary. The school environment was described as warm, welcoming and inclusive, ethnically diverse but exclusively Muslim. As a consequence of traversing a safe space in close proximity to Queensbridge Islamic Centre, a certain standard of exemplary conduct from children could be expected as they imbibed and enacted the manners and morals modelled by inspirational and accessible role models, be they teachers, the local imam or community members. Moreover, parents and pupils appreciated and enjoyed the fact that class sizes were small, facilitating easy access to teacher support. In addition, Zamzam Primary’s body of staff were seen as compassionate practitioners with their pupils’ best interests at heart. This idyllic institution was then contrasted with an almost caricatured portrayal of the state sector, replete with callous and vindictive teachers and badly behaved students who collectively diminished the overall learning experience. I also suggested that whilst not necessarily entirely accurate in their portrayal of the state sector, my participants’ accounts of their experiences at the empirical level were grounded in negative events at the actual level of reality thus understandably acting as a psychological causal mechanism that influenced their recollections. In the next section, I look at those aspects of school life at Zamzam Primary deemed negative by parents and pupils.

7.4 Parents and Pupils’ Negative Experiences of Zamzam Primary

In chapter 6.4, teaching participants identified four main areas of difficulty that they encountered whilst working at Zamzam Primary. Firstly, was a lack of funding and limited resources that had a negative impact upon teaching and learning. Secondly, disorganisation at a managerial and institutional level, alongside an underdeveloped support structure for staff. Next, the disconnect between the idealised Muslim school and the reality of Zamzam Primary, with what I described as a failed fellowship and superficial spirituality. Finally, a blurring of boundaries amongst professionals and

parents in a close-knit faith community characterised by dense network ties. Consulting parents and pupils, however, revealed a narrower critique of Zamzam Primary primarily centered on its building, budget and resources. I now explore my participants' accounts concerning "facilities and finances" below, with a few additional observations on the challenges of life in an independent Muslim school, connecting both back to the experiences and opinions of teaching staff and why their critiques might have differed. In doing so, I respond to my first research question (What are the perceptions of teachers, parents and past pupils regarding the role and purpose of a Muslim faith school in the London borough of Queensbridge?) and second (What are the motivations of key stakeholders – teachers, parents, past pupils – in relation to the role and purpose of a Muslim faith school in the London borough of Queensbridge?).

7.41 Finance and Facilities

As previously noted, Zine (2008a) and Merry (2010) have provided a vivid image of the challenges endured by Muslim schools in Canada and the United States respectively. I have also commented how many of Merry's observations seem equally applicable to many Muslim schools in Britain and, just as teachers had done, Zamzam Primary parents expressed concerns about resources. I start with Junaid who provided a possible cause for these issues:

The school in general runs at an average level but lacks resources and professionalism in a few aspects due to the infancy beginnings of its inception as a fully-fledged school.

(Email interview with researcher, July 2016)

In the extract above, Junaid explains that Zamzam Primary's shortcomings were in part attributable to its relative newness as an institution. Although ZPS had been in operation for a decade, for Junaid its "schoolness" was still in question – Zamzam Primary was just embarking on its journey to becoming an established school. Junaid's identification of issues with professionalism also echoes teacher Abdur-Raheem's general critique of Muslim schools, although what these were, were never explicitly specified. Whilst this might be explained in part by Abdur-Raheem's insider knowledge as a practitioner who had worked in both state and Muslim schools, including ZPS, it is unclear from the short extract what Junaid's specific

experiences of unprofessional conduct had been. Moreover, Junaid might have been somewhat cynical as a British born Muslim convert who had attended state schools as a child and thus had a tangible example to draw comparisons with.

Aside from resources, the issue of the school site itself and a lack of space would emerge in interviews with parents. In the extract below, Ibrahim has just shared the positives of sending his children to Zamzam Primary before going on to detail his grievances about the school building:

Ibrahim: For example, the fact that the school bit small, the playground, the way they have the- xxx the capa-, you know, space-wise they really- they need to have a bigger space.

Tom: How could they resolve that issue of space?

I: The only thing I can think of having a proper built school or moving, er, bigger – what you call – bigger?

T: Premises?

I: Yeah, bigger premises here.

(Interview with researcher, Zamzam Primary School, December 2015)

The issue of the school building and its playground possessing insufficient space would emerge as a recurring theme during interviews with parents and pupils in a way that it did not amongst teaching staff. Whilst Zamzam Primary's small budget could be seen as a downwards configurational cause (due to managerial decision making) that impacted upon school life, teachers focussed more on limited resources, perhaps because they had to plan and prepare lessons in a way that parents did not devote attention to. Moreover, the infrequency of the playground being raised as an issue might be attributable to the fact that teachers, unlike pupils (or parents with their children's interests at heart), did not play in it.

Vanessa was well positioned to offer a view from the perspective of parent and member of staff. Like Ibrahim, she would also share her observations on space:

The outdoor space is not ideal for them but they have PE elsewhere so it's not really a big deal, they still get to have PE.

(Interview with researcher, Zamzam Primary School, November 2015)

Vanessa comments as both service user and provider; however, I have included her statements in this chapter (as opposed to chapter 6 which concerned teachers' views) as she discusses the experiences of her children in Zamzam Primary thus foregrounding her role as a parent. Scrutinising her comments more closely, one might speculate that Vanessa was especially sensitive to the play needs of not just her children but also all pupils, as her hours of employment (10am-2pm) coincided with Zamzam students using the playground during breaks and lunch. Moreover, the school canteen was located directly next to the playground and was solely accessible from it: perhaps being in close proximity acted as a salient reminder of the limited space available to children, in which they could exercise and enjoy recreational activities. Furthermore, exploring the reasons for Vanessa's assertion ("they have PE elsewhere so it's not really a big deal"), one might attribute her optimism to the fact her husband Hamud was Zamzam Primary's PE coordinator. She was thus cognisant and confident in his ability to ensure children received sufficient opportunity to exercise and enjoy themselves – a psychological causal mechanism for such positivity.

Umm Ayan would also voice similar concerns about space and resources. Her friend, Umm Neimo, translates below as we examined the positives and negatives of sending their children to Zamzam Primary:

Umm Neimo: She said, one of the big problems, she said is the lack of library books. Sometimes the children won't get enough books to, um, from school and she said the other thing is, um, the small- the size of the space, especially she said the playground is very small. You know, if we had a bigger space for the children to play, yeah, those are the most important things she said.

Umm Ayan: (Speaking in Somali.)

UN: She said but now, you know, they understand it's not as simple as that and she said for the future if this space, especially the playground was to be expanded a bit more then the children would have a bigger area to play in then it's something to consider in the future inshallah.

(Interview with researcher, Zamzam Primary School, December 2015)

Just as Ibrahim and Vanessa identified the restricted space in the school as problematic, so would Umm Ayan. Whilst pinpointing the small playground as a concern, Umm Ayan exhibited empathy ("they understand it's not as simple as that"), although from her translator's use of the pronoun "they", it was not clear who

this referred to: Umm Ayan, the children, teachers, combinations of the above or all of them. Moreover, Umm Ayan also exhibited some of Vanessa's optimism ("it's something to consider in the future inshallah"), married to a practical pragmatism ("especially the playground was to be expanded a bit more"). Umm Ayan would also address the insufficient reading materials available to pupils at Zamzam Primary. This observation intrigued, as ZPS, contrary to many schools in Merry's US study, did possess a library albeit with a small and dated collection. Moreover, the school enjoyed a close relationship with the Queensbridge Central Library with teachers regularly taking their classes to borrow books and participate in activities. In hindsight, one might have posed further questions to unpick Umm Ayan's assessment of circumstances.

In my discussion with Umm Neimo the issue of the school building and, more specifically, resources would arise. Having asked her about the positives of sending her children to Zamzam Primary, Umm Neimo would expand upon the negatives:

To be honest, I haven't really seen- I mean, in terms of resources, we do lack a lot of resources but then it's not something that's pitting us behind our targets and where we should be so, to be honest, it's just the resource lack of I'd say. If we could be a bit more- more technology-wise and stuff like that but other than that we're very happy with our school and how our children are progressing and all these things.

(Interview with researcher, Zamzam Primary School, December 2015)

In her assessment of ZPS's merits, Umm Neimo identified issues with equipment and especially - one presumes - ICT ("If we could be a bit more- more technology-wise"). However, in Umm Neimo's estimation, this institutional impecuniousness did not impact negatively upon pupils' growth. Moreover, in voicing her optimistic outlook with references to "targets" and "progressing," Umm Neimo appeared to employ the jargon of corporate competitive management identified by Swain (2001) as an increasing feature of contemporary school life. Yet Umm Neimo seemed to offset competitiveness with communality as she described Zamzam Primary as "our school," hinting perhaps at the dense-network ties amongst members of the Queensbridge community in a more positive manner than some teaching participants.

ZPS pupils' criticisms of a lack of resources can be interpreted as a downwards configurational cause (on account of managerial spending decisions) for negative experiences in the school, coupled with the teaching practice of educators as an upwards normative cause. Shams would provide a succinct response of "Bad things... probably facilities" when asked about the pros and cons of attending ZPS. Similarly, Fatima would allude to something similar when comparing her current (state) school to Zamzam Primary: "There was more equipment; there were more rooms to do things like sports, experiments in." However, Ishaq would go into much more detail when asked to reflect upon his personal experiences of Zamzam Primary:

Ishaq: ...the resources? Sometimes you'd run out of glue sticks and sharpeners and pencils and the computers and the laptops- in my school, they're not exactly top of the range but there they had- barely had fifty gigabytes of data so the Internet was very slow.

Tom: Still is.

I: They had no software, which you could actually use to learn. You'd have to go onto a website, it would take ages and would be very slow so the resources weren't, yeah, very good.

T: What about science?

I: At Zamzam Primary, in all the years we've been there I think we only did four or five experiments so we'd barely do anything. The biggest experiment we do is go to the park and take pictures of leaves and go back and draw them, which isn't exactly science but that's what they made us do for our science lesson. So they were literally trying to find the easy way out of making you have an experience of an experiment whereas in my school you have chemicals, all the stuff that you need to do an actual science experiment from the text book whereas there, they'd read the textbook, give you the questions but they'd just give you whatever they thought you should so it could be totally unrelated to a topic you're doing but they'd give it to you cause they thought, yeah, that's what they should do.

T: Is it an issue of budget and resources?

I: Yeah.

(Interview with researcher, family home, October 2015)

In his comments, Ishaq drew an unfavourable comparison between Zamzam Primary and the state school he currently attended. His initial remarks concerning depleted resources ("Sometimes you'd run out of glue sticks and sharpeners and pencils"), would echo the comments of former TA Amar ("there were days when we ran out of paper to photocopy") who actually taught Ishaq for a year whilst he was

in Year 5. To contextualise Ishaq's comments, it is worth noting again that our discussion took place during a semi-structured interview in the family home that also involved his parents. During that interview, Sami had also critiqued a lack of resources, not just at Zamzam Primary but also at QIC as a whole. One might analyse the data and ask: was Ishaq intentionally or unknowingly reinforcing his father's stance? Ishaq's musings at the empirical level appear grounded in events at the actual level – an inclination supported by my own knowledge of Ishaq and our collective classroom experiences as his former teacher. Ishaq would then refer to Zamzam Primary's ICT lab. Seguing from "sharpeners and pencils" to "computers and laptops", Ishaq offered a very precise critique of the underlying cause for the poor performance of the PCs at pupils' disposal: "they had- barely had fifty gigabytes of data so the Internet was very slow." Moreover, the wholesale absence of programmes installed on school computers meant pupils had to access learning sites on the Internet. Contrary to my endorsement of the validity of Ishaq's account above, I would purport that he employed a certain amount of creative licence in the incidents recalled. Remembering my own experiences as a teacher in Zamzam Primary, I might respond by stating that the ZPS ICT lab did have software installed on the computers but perhaps not in the quality or quantity that Ishaq, a technology enthusiast, would have liked. Alternatively, one might suggest that Ishaq could have been referring to a period before my employment; he had attended the school from its inception (as a member of one of the two "founding families" of Zamzam Primary) and spent four years there before I began working at ZPS in 2010.

Ishaq next offered a critique on the delivery of science. Not only were opportunities to conduct experiments limited, Ishaq suggested a lack of industry or agency on the part of teaching staff as being a causal factor for underwhelming lessons ("they were literally trying to find the easy way out of making you have an experience of an experiment"). Moreover, the very essence of what was taught as science would be questioned: "the biggest experiment we do is go to the park and take pictures of leaves and go back and draw them, which isn't exactly science." The practice of teaching staff can thus be understood as an upwards normative cause for the school's inadequacies. If Ishaq's account is to be accepted as entirely accurate, then one could argue the case that teachers were complicit in an "unenacted curriculum," it being:

Those topics or elements within topics that are available for teaching from school departmental schemes of work but in practice are not taught by teachers in the classroom.

(Wilkinson, 2015: 153)

Ishaaq critique of Science is reminiscent of circumstances at Breen's Muslim "School A" whose former Head would note:

Science was a little more difficult in terms of practical limitations: "we taught science rather than learnt science, the children didn't have any resources so they didn't get to do science and to handle things... They were taught knowledge, scientific knowledge."

(Breen, 2009: 128)

Returning to the extract, Ishaaq then cites his current school as having the requisite resources to conduct experiments properly, in comparison to ZPS, where theory was prioritised out of necessity or even expediency ("there, they'd read the textbook, give you the questions"). Scrutinising the extract closely, one might ask if my closing question ("Is it an issue of budget and resources?") could have primed Ishaaq's response. Whilst he did affirm what I said, Ishaaq's comments before my own, suggest an additional upwards normative cause for events at the actual level: insubstantial effort on the part of staff.

Ishaaq's last point was devoted to the impact of congregational prayer on the structure of the school day, that he felt impacted deleteriously upon his quality of life:

Ishaaq: The thing was children were annoyed at was for lunch it would be hindered so they'd cut your lunch into three quarters: you'd have one quarter of your lunch to actually eat and play but the rest of it you'd go and pray so they wouldn't make it so you'd have a separate time. You'd pray when it's time and have your lunch after that so in a way they're sort of trying to bring people closer to the religion but if you make a student take away something he likes and then put something else in it, it's not exactly going to bring them closer to it. It's going to sort of push them away.

Tom: Especially if it's food!

I: Yeah. They literally rush you to make you eat your food. You'd have a huge bowl of pasta and you'd have to eat it quick enough so you could do wudu and go and pray and then you'd go straight to lessons.

(Interview with researcher, family home, October 2015)

In chapter 6.3 (“The Advantages of Working at Zamzam Primary”), I had established that an attraction, indeed, the major attraction for educators to work in Zamzam Primary was its institutional accommodation of prayer and in congregation - a communal and routine “macroritual involving the total school society” (Erickson, 1984: 55). Similarly, parents would also cite the opportunity for pupils to learn and practise their religion, including the observance of prayer, in the safe space of ZPS, as a reason for sending their children there. However, in this extract, Ishaq identified what this entailed for pupils: “they’d cut your lunch into three quarters.” The “they” are presumably teaching staff, thus suggesting a certain powerlessness on the part of pupils subjected to downwards configurational causes, welded by a nebulous “them,” an indistinct apportioning of blame witnessed amongst teaching participants throughout chapter 6.4. Alternatively, Ishaq’s choice of words, with its more informal use of pronouns as opposed to subjects, could have been made on account of whom he was talking to and presumptions made about my ability to infer meaning. Regardless, this adaptation and amendment of the traditional school lunch break to accommodate prayer - also an occurrence in Breen’s Medina Primary (2009) - resulted in dissatisfaction. Students had less time to relax, play and socialise and the quality of their dining experience was depreciated (“They literally rush you to make you eat your food”). In Ishaq’s view, insisting children adhere to an altered lunchtime routine so that they could pray, might foster resentment (“it’s not exactly going to bring them closer to it”) and possibly a (negative) reaction to religiosity (“It’s going to sort of push them away”).⁴³ Whilst many teaching staff enthused about the seamless accommodation of prayer in the school timetable, it appears that Ishaq - and possibly other children (if his remarks are to be taken at face value) - felt less enthusiastic about this if lunch could not be enjoyed in a relaxed manner or play opportunities were cut short. Having seen a certain amount of overlap in the critique of both parents and pupils alongside teachers regarding Zamzam Primary’s limited finances, resources and facilities that impacted upon teaching, learning and

⁴³ Abdur-Raheem would provide an adult’s perspective on the matter suggesting that the efforts of parents who were too forceful in their children’s study Islam could backfire: “They’re gonna hate Islam, which I’ve also seen, because of parents who are forcing the- you know, the issue of Hifz or memorising I want my child to- because there’s Muslims who intend to become memorisers of the Qur’an. And then you find out their intention is because of the narration from the Prophet says that 1 2 3 4 5 6 – you save ten people if you memorise the Qur’an and you’re going in. So they put that child in there, the child doesn’t want to go in there, forced to be in there, forced to learn Islam so if they’re forced to do something they will hate it, Islam or whatever it is. You force. They hate.”

general day-to-day life at ZPS, I now turn to a final critique raised. Again, parents and pupils echoed teaching participants in voicing their concerns, in this instance, regarding the blurred lines between staff and the wider school community in Queensbridge.

7.42 Blurred Lines

As noted earlier, a number of scholars have chronicled the cultures of close-knit orthodox faith communities, whilst Zine has presented the views of Canadian Muslim students at “Al-Rajab” and “Al-Safar” faith schools, in which the teachers were described as “more like brothers and sisters” (2009: 46) and the school as “a big family and a community” (2009: 47). As part of the wider Queensbridge Islamic Centre umbrella, parents, pupils and practitioners in ZPS were embedded in a small faith community connected by dense network ties. This meant that many participants were closely linked or even related, as noted by Ishaq and Marwa:

Ishaq: In Zamzam Primary, there were brothers, sisters, cousins, and nephews...

Tom: (Laughs)

Marwa: Nieces and aunties sometimes (laughs)!

I: There were occasions where you’d have a teacher teaching her own uncle.

M: Yeah.

T: Yeah (laughs).

I: So it’s a family chain they put in there and it’s just continuing instead of new people being added on.

(Interview with researcher, family home, October 2015)

Ishaq suggested that this dense social network (Milroy & Milroy, 1992) could inhibit progress as an organisation: “it’s a family chain they put in there and it’s just continuing instead of new people being added on.” Marwa would then expand upon her son’s comments:

Marwa: Zamzam Primary School was more like, even for the parents, like a family-business, isn’t it? You know, sometimes you don’t have, kind of like, that distinction between who’s the parent and who’s the teacher.

Tom: Really?

M: Cause, you know, they get very friendly and everything else. State schools is more like-

T: Is that a good or a bad thing?

M: It's a good thing because- it's a good thing- it's got its good side and bad side. Bad side is that some of the parents will take advantage of that and they will start saying things and say I want you to do this so there's not that boundary that actually says: that's a school, you the parent and there's some boundaries you can't actually go over. You have to, you know, respect things so in that sense, yeah. I mean, I used to get on very well with most of the teachers and staff but I knew where I stood. There's things you can't- but some parents are not like that! Especially when Somali teachers and Somali parents (chuckles)!

(Interview with researcher, family home, October 2015)

In her reflections, Marwa echoed the concerns of teaching staff like A'rfa and Nadeem who pinpointed blurred boundaries as problematic. Whilst an atmosphere of conviviality prevailed, this could lead to unclear lines of demarcation in roles ("sometimes you don't have, kind of like, that distinction between who's the parent and who's the teacher"). Marwa also alluded to unscrupulous conduct in which parents would exploit their close relationship with teachers in a manner not too dissimilar to how Saffiyah suggested, staff would play the "Muslim card" with each other; an upwards normative cause for an informal, and at times, uncomfortable atmosphere at Zamzam Primary. These circumstances at ZPS would be compared unfavourably with state schools, an irony perhaps considering Marwa's reticence about such institutions ideologically, although this remark perhaps indicates some acceptance on Marwa's part with regards to professional practice and normative isomorphism. Marwa also differentiated herself from her peers: whilst she too enjoyed camaraderie with staff, she knew where to draw a line. This was contrasted with other members of the community, particularly those of Somali heritage, perhaps because they constituted the largest demographic of service users.

7.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have shown how parents and pupils were a lot less vocal in their criticisms of Zamzam Primary than teachers, focussed solely on school facilities and resources as well as the blurred boundaries between parents, pupils, staff and community members. One suspects that this was because parents' and especially pupils' experiences of ZPS were limited to the educative service provided itself.

They might not have possessed insider knowledge in the way teaching participants did, especially with regards to planning and procedures behind the scenes. One area of overlap amongst all informants was concern with Zamzam Primary's facilities and finance, the response being a pragmatic acceptance of the state of affairs in a small community school. Some parents offered solutions but suggested they were unworkable without a sufficient budget. Nevertheless, the accounts of parents were much more positive than those of practitioners and were suggestive of an underlying confidence in the Islamicness of the institution, despite its material limitations.

Like teaching participants, many parents (and perhaps less so, pupils) had invested in an idealised Islam that was not enacted locally in the way they had hoped. This compelling narrative helped to explain why parents sent their children to the school. The desire for social mobility was also present amongst adult informants' accounts thus exhibiting a certain overlap in outlook with parents from ethnically Chinese migrant communities in the West (as noted by Louie, 2001 and Chen 2007). And while this was also an objective of Zamzam as an institution (as expressed in its motto, on its website and promotional literature), I did not determine how and to what extent ZPS helped or hindered opportunities on this front, as this was beyond the scope of this study. Nevertheless, whilst parents were able to access the national curriculum at ZPS, its real draw was its Islamic curriculum, although this was insufficiently conceptualised and articulated by participants be they teachers, parents or pupils. The sole "objective" quantitative metrics available to assess the quality of education in ZPS were Ofsted inspection reports, that had delivered satisfactory ratings in the past three inspections. Whilst these reports were certainly useful, I have tried to understand and appraise the education in Zamzam Primary not just within the philosophical and methodological parameters of a neoliberal ideology of education.

Therefore, drawing upon my unique emic and etic views as both employee and researcher, I found pupils happy and fulfilled in Zamzam Primary, enjoying its intimate atmosphere and responding well to its supportive teachers – circumstances acting as a pull factor for parents to send their children to the school. Whilst parents offered critiques of mainstream schooling as an additional push factor, their representation of the state sector was at times underdeveloped, focussing on those

areas that seemingly contradicted an Islamic orthodoxy as they understood it. As an aside, one might also need to interrogate what was actually meant by terms such as secularism and mainstream, as used in participants' descriptions of state schools and how these concepts cannot be easily distilled into what I described as banalities, binaries and bullet points in my literature review. Nevertheless, I do notice that whilst participants seemingly benefitted from the 3-point moral matrix liberties (to borrow from Haidt, 2012) on offer in exercising their choices regarding the education of their children, they critiqued those same liberties that allowed for lifestyle choices different to their own. By extension, the personal politics of participants might be socially conservative by western liberal standards, yet what this entailed regarding political party engagement could not be determined and, again, was a line of enquiry beyond the scope of this investigation. Nevertheless, the underlying processes operating at a psychological level seemed to be an amalgamation of Haidt's 3 and 6-point matrix value system that occurred unconsciously or was, at the very least, unacknowledged. As noted earlier, parental criticisms of Zamzam Primary were less pronounced and somewhat predictable: facilities and finance featuring prominently as well as the blurred lines noted by staff resurfacing too. Perhaps these outcomes were attributable to the parents I interviewed. Had I spoken to other parents - for example, those who had removed their children from the school or returned to the state system - then I might have been given a different version of events. In the final chapter, I will interrogate and unpick these tensions in greater detail and attempt to draw conclusions.

Chapter 8: Conclusion

In this chapter I review the findings of my data analysis linking them back to the initial literature review. I then reflect upon the effectiveness of this investigation and potential implications for future research.

8.1 Queensbridge and its Community

This ethnographically informed study began by my describing the surroundings of the study site and its community, to situate my investigation in its proper context. Queensbridge is among the largest boroughs in inner London and can be described as superdiverse (Vertovec, 2009b), characterised by the “lived everyday multiculturalism” and “conviviality” of Wessendorf (2014: 9); QIC governor and madrasa Head Saluhideen would comment how “it’s very mixed; people from all different backgrounds.” Whilst the Muslim community or rather, communities (Gilliat-Ray, 2010) experienced difficulties in initially establishing themselves in Queensbridge (Nadeem), they now enjoyed the fruits of Islamic fellowship. This almost family-like atmosphere amongst the Muslims of Queensbridge was facilitated by London’s superdiversity as a global city in a way that they might not be able to enjoy outside of the capital (Vanessa). Nevertheless, living in Queensbridge presented challenges. Many participants remarked that the area was blighted with poverty, pollution (Maryam), crime, gangs, drugs (Ubbah) and violence (Sumayyah), that impacted upon one’s quality of life (Hamud). Whilst such views were corroborated by the statistics presented in my introductory chapter 1.1, I could not personally confirm or deny the frequency and magnitude of these antisocial experiences for local residents, as I spent little time in the area outside of ZPS, a disclosure made clear from the outset that I acknowledged would inevitably shape my own analysis, interpretation and understanding of experiences and events. I also noted that my informants exhibited a matter of fact pragmatism in presenting day-to-day life in the area, with underlying mechanisms and structures rarely discussed, if at all, circumstances perhaps attributable to my own interview technique.

8.2 The Muslim School: Ethos and Curriculum

Whilst exploring research questions 1.1 (“What ideologies and discourses underpin Muslim faith schools?”) and 1.2 (“What tensions, if any, exist between government

education policy and the conceptions of stakeholders in Muslim faith schools?”), teachers, parents and children were unanimous in asserting that ethos was an integral component of the Muslim school. Whilst there exist many competing understandings of ethos (Breen, 2009), I would define ethos in my setting as those religious values that underpinned and informed the ambience and atmosphere of an Islamic institution, thus establishing a safe space conducive to teaching, learning and the practice of faith. Governor Dasham, a convert to Islam, would articulate ethos as “integrating religion into all aspects of education”, whilst for Qur’an teacher and QIC imam Samir it meant that there was nothing that could “contradict the faith” in Zamzam Primary. Hamud would expand upon this notion, stating that ethos was drawn from “the Sunnah and the Qur’an” and “virtues” such as “patience, respect and loyalty.” However, he would be the only participant to elucidate what these values were in any detail, perhaps because I as a co-religionist and fellow educator would presumably share, understand and implement those same values. Furthermore, despite participant calls for and even a celebration of ethnic, cultural and linguistic diversity, intra-religious diversity of the sort mentioned in the literature review, was generally absent, with participants presenting Islam as a monolithic institution. Parents and pupils would also see an Islamic ethos at the core of a Muslim school, manifest in observance of ritual, uniform, diet and conduct. Parents in particular perceived the Muslim school and ZPS especially as a “guarded space” (Tripp, 2006: 11) that protected the innocence of children, a quality that was innate “rather than dependent on the intersecting and reflexive agency of different social agents, and material processes, positioned in space and by relations of power, emotion and meaning” (Duschinsky, 2013: 774). However, whilst many teaching participants would go on to question how profound and pronounced this guarded space was, only Aaqib, a teacher himself in a state school, challenged the idea outright, suggesting that it was permeable and thus open to aspects of “popular culture” such as “songs” and “Eastenders.”

Parents, pupils and practitioners were also in agreement concerning curriculum as an integral feature of the Muslim school. This was an underdeveloped concept as ethos had been perhaps, in part, due to the demands of the workplace in the case of teaching staff, that left little time for deeper philosophical reflection regarding the underlying mechanisms and structures of education at the causal level. Nevertheless,

ZPS possessed a syllabus that was partitioned in two: the national curriculum and an Islamic curriculum comprised of Islamic Studies, Qur'an and Arabic, although the latter subject was given less prominence by a number of participants, especially teachers. In this way, the Muslim school and ZPS specifically experienced a "compartmentalisation of knowledge into sacred and secular spheres" that mirrored the "educational culture of non-faith educational settings" (Wilkinson, 2015: 176). However, informants differed concerning the importance of different subjects and how they defined them: for example, teaching assistant Sabrina would describe the Islamic sciences as "core subjects", whilst former-pupil Ayan would describe "Maths, English, Science, Art and stuff" as "academic subjects". Irrespective of how participants chose to define subjects, the ZPS curriculum was weighted in favour of the secular as had been the case in Kucukcan's North London Turkish Muslim school (1998). Some teaching participants saw limited opportunities to Islamicise the curriculum entirely, on account of the distinct nature of subjects; for example, Samir would posit that "Maths is 5 plus 5 equals 10 there's nothing to do with the religion in Maths." Conversely, the ever-imaginative A'rfa and Amar perceived opportunities to include Islam "in every single subject" as did governor Dasham who opined "there's always a link", although he suggested that one wouldn't necessarily contrive such an amalgamation. His colleague on the governing board, Sami, went one stage further, suggesting that in the past Zamzam Primary did have an Islamicised curriculum in which "everything was linked to Islam."

Many parents enrolled their children in ZPS as they invested ideologically, emotionally and financially in the school as a guarded space against the "intrusion of elements heterogeneous, foreign or inferior" to an immanent "essence" of childlike innocence (Duschinsky, 2013: 774). This notion would be reinforced by teaching participants such as Samir, who declared that "art, dance and music" were "totally absent here", although Ofsted would critique ZPS on account of pupils' limited "opportunity to extend their cultural awareness" (2013). Moreover, just as participants had done in Martinez (2012) and Zine's (2008b) studies of Muslim schools in the United States and Canada, Hamud would describe ZPS as a "bubble" in which children were isolated, encountering difficulty when transitioning into mainstream spaces, be it the street or school. Conversely, some participants questioned whether ZPS was actually a "total institution" in the vein of Milner Jr.'s

Gates School (2006). Rumaysah and Sumayah were especially vocal concerning the consumption of mainstream media amongst the Queensbridge community and how pop culture infiltrated the supposedly sanctified space of the school/mosque referencing “Frozen,” “Netflix” and “X-Factor.” I also noted my agreement with teaching participants of a “scorner” persuasion (and in doing so, positioned myself as one of their number as opposed to being a “true believer”) in questioning and subsequently dismissing the notion of Zamzam Primary as an innocence preserving bubble. Some participants also observed that society was tolerant and accommodating of the needs of religious minorities, such as the performance of prayer in secondary schools (Aaqib), meaning children would eventually adapt after initial disorientation (Samir). Returning to Ofsted, teaching participants described their experiences of the “inspection regime” (Dasham) in a climate of heightened scrutiny of Muslim schools. The current paradigm was precipitated by the “Trojan Horse” (Miah, 2015) “moral panic” (Hebdige, 1979) and manifested with a preoccupation over the teaching of “British values” (Saffiyah). A process of coercive isomorphism shaped school policy and procedure, Ofsted inspections being a downwards normative cause compelling school governors and management to enact policy change - a downwards configurational cause. Parent-governor Sami would describe how ZPS had evolved over the years, becoming more professionalised but losing its Islamic character, all that remained being the “trappings of faith” (Wilkinson, 2015: 176). An economically disenfranchised minority ethnic religious community were compelled to acquiesce to the interdicts of Ofsted as they bent the school “into compliance with public policy or ideology” (Adelkhah & Keiko, 2011: 7), thus accepting the “neo-liberal secular consensus” (Miah, 2015: 37). I would offer my own emic view of events at the actual level, being an employee of ZPS since 2010, noting that increasing professionalisation of the service provided manifested in the micro day-to-day routines and practices, supporting the theory of institutional isomorphism as being applicable to the school with its burgeoning “performativity culture” (Grace & O’Donoghue, 2004: iv). Accordingly, I aligned my own view with those participants who felt there was little difference between state schools and Zamzam Primary other than an “Islamic effect” (Panjwani, 2009). However, whilst I was satisfied that some of these changes were in direct response to Ofsted inspections – a downward normative cause I was cognisant of as an employee of the school – I felt others had evolved over time, the causal mechanism being

somewhat more nebulous and elusive. I thus returned to a question posed in my literature review: which individual or authority can determine the orthodoxy, authenticity and ultimately effectiveness of a Muslim school: parents and pupils, teachers and governors, imams or inspectors? My somewhat open-ended musing was that maybe one should not ask whether a particular Muslim school is authentically Islamic, but rather, what is intended by the word “authentic”?

8.3 Teaching and Parenting

In looking at research question 2.1 (“Why do teachers choose to work in a Muslim school?”), teaching staff at Zamzam Primary School and the Queensbridge Islamic Centre would share a number of reasons for entering their profession. Amongst male participants such as Adil, Hamud and Saluhideen, awakening religiosity - depicted as a process of “self-making” and “distancing the self from the past” (Liberatore, 2013: 228) – would act as a catalyst for involvement in education. This occurred amidst a textual community (Fox, 1994) in which seeking knowledge, and knowledge of the religion in particular, was encouraged and respected, especially in Islamic institutions in Muslim majority countries such as Egypt and Saudi Arabia. Male participants also exhibited a pragmatic professionalism in which teaching was seen as a means to remuneration as well as an integral part of the mission to impart Islam to the next generation of Muslims. Without my seeking to reproduce gendered binaries, I did find that female teaching staff would cite personal enjoyment (Rumaysah & Sumayah) and a love of children as a primary motivating factor to become teachers, some suggesting there being a natural transition from parenting to teaching (Zara). Informants both male (Amar) and female (Maryam) stated how they stumbled into the profession, as had been the case in Evans’s ethnography of an urban Jamaican secondary school (2012). Alternatively, some felt they were guided by divine predestination, thereby othering agency in a manner Peshkin observed amongst his Christian educators: “some teachers enter their profession and learn only after the fact it was God’s will for them that they teach” (1986: 64). In this manner, informants identified a causal mechanism outside of their own agency, namely divine ordinance that precipitated decisions made and events occurring at the actual level. Using Peshkin’s typology of true believers” (1986: 55) and “scorners” (1986: 218) alongside Grace’s “pragmatic survivors” (2002: 192), I also attempted to identify and understand participants’ varying degrees of investment in the mission of

Islamic education. There were no open displays of disenchantment, dissent or departure from official doctrine be it Islamic or institutional amongst true believers such as Samir, Saluhideen, Sabrina and Nadeem. However, outside of the empirical realm wherein accounts were co-constructed with myself, such “professional” piety may have been less performed or pronounced and more “inconsistently orthodox” (Peshkin, 1986: 171); the latter a quality the scorner Rumaysah would identify in herself. Perhaps the most significant theme to emerge from the interviews was an amalgamation of neoliberal ideology and expression with the orthopraxy of religious conservatism - from Sabrina’s consumption of “self-help” courses and materials to Adil and Hamud’s “market-speak” as they “added value” (Canagarajah, 2016: 15) to their repertoire as professionals. This “virtuous capitalism” (Tripp, 2006: 31) or “prosperity theology” (Hunt, 2000) appeared both natural and negotiable to participants, especially in their understanding of career-based success. Whilst this manifested in the empirical domain as part of discussions with informants, to what degree such ideologies and expressions actually informed their teaching practice and daily lives was harder to determine, as were its causal mechanisms, be they psychological or structural.

In addressing research question 2.2 (“Why do parents choose to send their children to a Muslim faith school?”), parent participants provided a number of reasons for sending their children to Zamzam Primary. Most frequently cited was the notion that ZPS was a “guarded space” (Tripp, 2006: 31), an authentically religious environment in which the “true Islam,” an “‘ideal type’ construct, free from denominational links or ties” (Miah, 2015: 113) was observed. This authentic Islam would often be presented as being anchored in “the Sunnah and the Qur’an” (Hamud). Pupils could study their faith and practise its rituals alongside learning the national curriculum – “the best of both worlds: “academic excellence, spiritual growth.” A good education would facilitate social mobility so that children might support their families financially as noted by parent Abu-Fatima and echoing the findings of studies involving migrant Chinese families in the West (Louie, 2001 and Chen, 2007). Informants also referred to their own negative experiences of attending (Vanessa), working in (Abdur-Raheem) and sending their children to (Umm Ayan) mainstream schools as a reason for their disillusionment and ultimately disengagement with the state sector, opting to send their children to ZPS. Lastly, a number of parents

presented individualised ideological critiques of mainstream schooling as a driver for their involvement with ZPS. Of particular concern were the freedoms (especially sexual) afforded citizens of a modern liberal democracy that might be openly addressed by practitioners and enjoyed by pupils in state schools (Connor) alongside participation in the rites and rituals of other faith groups (Vanessa). I noted that informant representations of the state sector were at times underdeveloped, focussing on those areas that seemingly contradicted their understanding of Islamic orthodoxy, also suggesting that further interrogation of terms such as secularism and mainstream might be required. Informant outlooks were perhaps indicative of an alignment with the six-anchored moral matrix of social conservatives (Haidt, 2012) with an emphasis on values such as authority, loyalty and especially sanctity. Ironically, participants seemingly benefitted from the 3-point moral matrix liberties on offer in a “W.E.I.R.D.” (Western, educated, industrialised, rich and democratic) society (Haidt, 2016) when exercising their choices regarding the education of their children, whilst critiquing those very same liberal systems that allowed for lifestyle choices different from their own.

8.4 Zamzam Primary School: Positives and Negatives

Exploring research question 2 as a whole (“How do parents, pupils and practitioners perceive and experience the role of the Muslim school in the community?”), perhaps the most interesting difference concerning the positive aspects of Zamzam Primary occurred between parents and practitioners. Parents unsurprisingly were enthusiastic about the advantages for their children as students at the school, whereas teachers and pupils described the advantages for themselves as employees and learners. Parents enrolled their children in ZPS as they trusted the Islamicness of its environment and the schoolness of the institution as exemplified in the school slogan: “The Best of Both Worlds: Academic Excellence, Spiritual Growth.” Compassionate and caring “Murabbis” taught children in small classes, allowing for the cultivation of Muslim character rooted in the school ethos. Pupil participants were particularly effusive about the attentive support they received from motivated teachers in a harmonious atmosphere conducive to learning. This conviviality and camaraderie was a product of the ethnically superdiverse yet exclusively Muslim body of staff and students allowing participants to feel “comfortable” and “fit in” as TA A’rfa would note. Aside from enjoying the inclusivity of this moral economy (a

term I suggested required further exploration in its relation to idealised visions of a monolithic Islam held by many participants), teachers expressed their approval that they could not only perform their prayers at ZPS but in congregation - a communal and routine “macroritual involving the total school society” (Erickson, 1984: 55) - that they might not be able to access and participate in if employed in a secular workplace. Likewise, teaching participants also felt able to assert their identity by using overtly Islamic language and by wearing Muslim clothing, the latter especially so in the case of female participants, although what dressing Islamically entailed was never communicated – perhaps because I would instinctively know as a co-religionist. Throughout their accounts, teaching participants would describe the freedoms they enjoyed in ZPS to express themselves as members and practitioners of a faith tradition, employing the parlance of libertarianism as understood by Haidt (2012) with minor adaptations – “the right to be left alone to practise one’s faith, free from government - and by extension, employer - interference.” However, I would exhibit reserve in making absolute proclamations regarding participants’ political leanings in the electoral arena whilst positioning them as predominantly socially conservative.

Teaching participants were far more critical of Zamzam Primary than parents and pupils. I postulated that this might be a result of employees possessing “insider information” concerning policy and procedure within the workplace, in a way that children and parents would not. Nevertheless, participants were unanimous in agreement that ZPS suffered from insufficient resources - from former-pupil Ishaq’s lament about a lack of “glue sticks and sharpeners and pencils and the computers”, to TA Amar’s “struggles” on the “days when we ran out of paper to photocopy”. In addition, the school building and facilities were not purpose-built for teaching and learning, although governor Sami would praise his colleagues’ resourcefulness and both parents and practitioners remained positive in spite of difficult circumstances. Issues surrounding facilities, equipment and recruitment – the latter point raised by both Sarah and Maryam – could all be traced back to institutional impecuniousness. As a critical realist ethnographer analysing deep structures and generative mechanisms, I uncovered that many teaching participants felt disorganisation was also to blame for day-to-day difficulties experienced. This ranged from Zara’s critique of the lack of support provided to new teachers, to A’rfa

being assigned tasks beyond her level of experience and expertise that could not be completed in her contracted hours. However, none of my informants could or would identify the specific individuals or generative mechanism responsible for this disarray. Blame was apportioned to an amorphous “them” in a manner similar to participants in Nichols and Beyon’s study of capitalism, class relations and the modern factory: management (1977). Offering my own emic view as an employee, I added that this disorganisation might have been a manifestation of senior leaders being overstretched. This downwards configurational cause - limited finances and a subsequent inability to hire appropriately experienced and adept staff in sufficient numbers – meant that Maryam’s observation that “they’ll have one person doing five people’s jobs”, was authentic if not entirely accurate.

Teaching participants would also critique Zamzam Primary for possessing the “trappings of faith” (Wilkinson, 2015: 176) but lacking spiritual substance. Inside this environment of “failed fellowship, superficial spirituality” employees might “talk about each other” (Maryam) or take advantage of colleagues’ sincerity (Abdur-Raheem), playing the “Muslim card” to “let things slide” (Saffiyah). This was allegedly more pronounced amongst female participants who themselves expressed belief in more gendered roles and characteristics such as “motherliness” (A’rfa), as would educators in Peshkin’s fundamentalist Christian school (1986). KS1 Teacher Rumaysah would valorise ZPS’s idyllic past in a manner similar to members of other subcultures (Hebdige, 1979) declaring that the school had once been more religious as manifest in (female) teachers’ uber-modest dress, an outlook shared by parents Marwa and Sami. I postulated that this disconnect between an idealised Islam and the reality at the actual level of ZPS related back to informants’ earlier articulations of the nature of the Muslim school, its ethos and curriculum and discussions around “authentic” Islam addressed in the literature review; determining the causal processes, be they systematic or psychological, for events experienced at the actual level, would prove much more elusive. Aside from Sami and Marwa though, no other parents referred to pseudo religiosity, perhaps because they were not privy to the internal politics and practices within the school. Zamzam Primary School, and by extension Queensbridge Islamic Centre, were at the epicentre of a faith community connected by a dense social network (Milroy & Milroy, 1992). This was evidenced in part by the fact that members of the school community were even related to each

other, as noted by Ishaq and also seen in Martinez (2012) and Breen's studies (2009) of other Muslim schools. The close-knit yet superdiverse Queensbridge community helped mould an environment in the mosque and its school that was praised for being safe, inclusive and communal, facilitating the practise of one's faith that might be difficult outside of a global city like London (Vanessa). Conversely, this could lead to an obfuscation of boundaries, especially amongst teachers and parents (A'rfa) and impinge upon professional practice according to Marwa, who would develop personal strategies to maintain privacy.

8.5 Investigation Effectiveness and Implications

Looking back at my study of Zamzam Primary and the Queensbridge community, I am satisfied with many aspects. Firstly, my position as an "insider" to the school and mosque enabled me to access spaces, records and most importantly, participants (to a degree - more on this topic shortly) in a way that many scholars in the field of ethnography have found more challenging (for example, Sarroub, 2002 and 2005; Lumsden, 2009; Clarke, 2011; Marsden, 2011; Barron, 2013; Gregory et al; 2012 and Liberatore, 2013). Secondly, the sheer amount of participants interviewed - 36 in 16 months - meant I had a large bank of data to draw upon. Thirdly, my "reflexive" approach as a critical realist researcher engaging in the interview process and subsequent data analysis (as advocated by Sharpe, 2005; Whitehead, 2005; Lumsden, 2009 and Williams, 2013), meant I took the appropriate precautions to ensure I did not expose "the Achilles heel of phenomenological ethnography" and succumb to an "uncritical acceptance of subjects' own accounts" (Sharpe, 2005: 8). To recall an earlier description, reflexivity is the disclosure of the self-perceptions, methodological setbacks and psychology that influenced the collection, interpretation and representation of data; an acknowledgment that the researcher is part of the world they study (O'Reilly, 2002 and Lumsden, 2009) and subsequent agency in constructing that "reality" (Sharpe, 2005).

Assessing my use of critical realism as a philosophical framework for this study, I feel this has been a mostly successful enterprise, especially in exploring the empirical and actual domains of reality through participant accounts. Adopting a critical realist lens proved especially useful in analysing and interpreting the data generated in interviews with informants and the potential tensions and

inconsistencies that may exist between the empirical and actual domains of reality; for example, the authenticity of experience felt by participants versus the accuracy in events they reported as well as the disconnect between the idealised Muslim school and the performed reality of Zamzam Primary, compelled to operate within the parameters established by the Department of Education and enforced by Ofsted. In my estimation, this tension has come to occupy the core of this thesis or, at the very least, is its most fascinating feature. Whilst a “member of the faithful” for the past twelve years, I have not lost my artist’s contrarian spirit nor my academic’s scepticism and inquisitiveness. I am thus not entirely surprised to encounter such disclosures concerning these issues on the part of participants, especially teaching staff, although I had not anticipated them being as pronounced as they were. Nevertheless, my selection of critical realism as a philosophical framework for my investigation at an early stage, would go on to prove especially apt in attempting to unpick this tension between the ideal and the real. What I found more challenging was drilling down to the causal level of reality with its underlying structures and processes - systematic or psychological - that shaped events and participants’ perceptions of them. This has proven to be a much more elusive exercise with conclusions less certain, although Vincent & Wapshott’s model (2014) did prove useful in identifying upwards and downwards normative and configurational causes for events and actions within the organisation. With that in mind, I cannot claim this study is a purist critical realist endeavour; rather, it is a qualitative investigation, influenced and informed by Bhaskar’s philosophy, that has enjoyed some but not wholesale success in identifying the layers of reality experienced by participants and interpreted by myself. To paraphrase Al-Amoudi & Wilmot as referenced in chapter 3: I have taken an “optimistic reading” of critical realism as “an ongoing project”, using it as a means of “accessing the real” (2011: 29) to various degrees of success.

Where I can make more a confident claim is that I have been open about all the above elements in my data analysis chapters, as well as being clear concerning the shortcomings of my pilot study that I addressed and amended for the main study. Moreover, I was especially pleased with the data generated with teaching and pupil participants, my existing relations with them as a work colleague and educator helping to facilitate the interviews. Whilst such circumstances could have been problematic, I did my upmost to ensure I approached the interview process as

researcher first and colleague/teacher second, whilst at the same time disclosing my unavoidable but manageable partiality in my writing. At times (especially in the pilot study) I did lapse into an “over-rapport” (Earren and Karner, 2009: 141 in Mann, 2011: 15) with some informants (Rumaysah and Sumayah particularly), although I feel this didn’t ultimately detract from the authentic documentation of informant opinion and experience. Consequently, teachers were very willing to disclose their thoughts and feelings on a number of matters pertaining to my research questions, as did the young people interviewed. In addition, my pre-existing knowledge as an employee of Zamzam Primary enabled me to ask specific questions or later, revisit data and flesh it out; for example, in challenging some of Ishaq’s assertions concerning resources in the school or Ibrahim’s assessment of the school being “outstanding.” Finally, without wishing to reproduce and perpetuate images of essentialised youthful innocence critiqued by Duschinsky (2013), there was a refreshing honesty and humour in the data generated with young people, especially the aforementioned Ishaq’s lament concerning curtailed playtimes and low-tech resources. Were I to repeat, expand or conduct a new study, I would certainly like to solicit the views of more British Muslim pupils as this is an area I feel that can be explored in greater depth, so contributing to the body of knowledge.

An area I found particularly challenging was soliciting parental participation. This might be attributable to a number of factors. Firstly, as a part-time employee of Zamzam Primary, I only work at the school three days a week, commuting from west London. While this needn’t be problematic, it does mean I am a less enduring presence in the school and amidst the Queensbridge community in comparison to other colleagues who work full-time, live in the locality and are more active in community life. Two other factors might be considered alongside terms of employment and place of residence: my ethnicity and gender. It has been noted that the Caucasian convert to Islam can enjoy a certain amount of cultural capital within Muslim circles (Suleiman, 2016); however, from experience I have encountered a perception amongst one’s coreligionists that one’s whiteness does make one a different type of Muslim in both positive and negative ways. In the case of the latter, this whiteness can be symbolic of a Western establishment that has a history of antagonism towards ethnic minorities and Muslims in particular, as Rumaysah would point out to me when discussing the issue of “blurred lines” in the Queensbridge

community. Consequently, community members might exhibit a cool deference to me as a professional and figure of authority without ever developing a warm rapport. As a corollary to the above, I had found it difficult over my years working at ZPS as a male teacher – never mind researcher – to establish amicable and meaningful relationships with many female parents and carers of the children I taught. As a reflective practitioner, one might speculate if this was on account of an aloof personality or unsociable conduct on my part, but I suspect it was partially because of my gender. As noted previously, the general ambience of the Queensbridge Muslim community was one of religious conservatism, thus informing the nature of gender interactions, which at times had an awkward formality, as I found with teaching participant Saffiyah. I had previously experienced difficulties on this front in soliciting parents who I didn't personally know, especially female, to participate in my Masters research (Evans, 2013). Consequently, I decided to draw upon existing relationships with parents of children I taught or had taught, to organise interviews for this study. In doing so, I tried hard to obtain a balance in genders and although the asymmetry in the numbers of parents (6 female, 10 male) interviewed was not ideal, it did not have a detrimental impact upon the quality of data gathered or its analysis. Ironically, I was able to achieve a gender balance amongst teaching participants, a set of circumstances I attribute to our closer working relations and more frequent and informal interactions as colleagues in a work environment. The interview process did produce a sizeable amount of good quality data from parent participants. However, in retrospect, analysis focussed on a core number of parents whilst others' contributions were somewhat limited, largely on account of fluency in English, which lead to shorter and less detailed reflections; for example, in the case of Ubbah, Ismail and Hamda. Were I to repeat or expand the study, I might explore alternative means of interviewing participants, especially those parents for whom English is an additional language. This could be done, for example, by providing questionnaires in home languages or working in collaboration with an interpreter as was the case with Umm Neimo and Umm Ayan (although this can also present issues of accurate representation).

A further critique concerning the recruitment of parent informants for my research was that a number were also employees of Zamzam Primary and/or Queensbridge Islamic Centre. Firstly, as part of my reflexive practice, I acknowledge the validity

of this position and my response would be that my aim was to interview more parents who were not involved with ZPS or QIC. However, this again links back to the willingness and availability of informants to participate in my research and this was hindered somewhat by the variables mentioned above. Conversely, a by-product of this scenario was to demonstrate the composition of the Queensbridge community as being close-knit like other faith communities in urban settings (see: Peshkin, 1986; Fishman, 1990; Fader, 2009 and Martinez, 2012), characterised by a dense network (Milroy & Milroy, 1992) and overlapping roles (i.e. Vanessa as both parent and ZPS canteen manager or Jamal as parent and QIC caretaker). Were I to extend my research, I would seek to interview community members not involved with the school or mosque as parents, pupils or teachers, to determine their views on a number of research questions as insiders without necessarily being stakeholders in ZPS or consumers of its services. In addition, reaching out to practitioners in the wider field of Islamic education to garner their views could have strengthened my research, had time permitted.

In conducting this qualitative investigation, I have been both the “instrument” (Walford, 2001 and Whitehead, 2005) and “primary source of data” (Woods, 1994: 313) in a collaborative and active process of meaning-making venture with informants (Holstein and Gubrium, 1995 in Mann, 2011). I have used “thick description” to “get at the patterns behind how a specific action takes place in terms of its context” (Heath et al 2008: 41). Invariably, my own biases and baggage will have influenced both research and representation, which I have sought to acknowledge at all times throughout my writing, as part of my reflexive practice. Whilst I would never claim to be the “transcendent observer” (Clifford, 1986: 125) who is the “guarantor of evidence” (Gertz 1988 in Schostak, 2002: 165), I have sought to exercise “disciplined subjectivity” (Erickson, 1984: 59) through my research, synthesising both emic and etic views. In addition, I concede that the ethnographic representations of Zamzam Primary and the Queensbridge community in this thesis are “partial, partisan and selective” (Brewer, 2000: 127) - an outlook congruent with a critical realist ontology of a reality that exists “independent of human consciousness” (Yeung, 1997: 52).

With the above in mind, I have documented, all things considered, the “normality” or those normal aspects of Zamzam Primary by mainstream educational standards and cultural norms. I have captured in participant accounts the minutiae of the mundanity of school life in twenty-first century Britain, ranging from the superdiversity and dense social networks of inner city London, the intrigue of office politics, the stresses of teaching, the aspirations of parents to the voracious consumption of pop culture amongst young people. I also suspect much of this snapshot would be replicated amongst other faith schools, Muslim or otherwise, throughout the UK. When situated in a “W.E.I.R.D.” (Western, educated, industrialised, rich and democratic) society (Haidt, 2016) and obliged to implement Ofsted recommendations during an especially politicised climate, there is little scope for any faith school, especially Muslim, to explore alternative approaches to education in the vein of a Summerhill,⁴⁴ as discussed in my literature review. Those that staunchly adhere to a narrow curriculum and closeted, even confrontational world-view are invariably shut down, as had been the case with a number of institutions during the process of my research (Adams, 2015; Loeb, 2016; McInnes, 2016 and Robinson, 2016). Perhaps a by product of this, in the case of Zamzam Primary, and, one suspects, other faith schools – Muslim or otherwise – is a tension experienced by management and staff in implementing religious ideals, however noble, powerful and compelling, that are perhaps unrealistic or unachievable when dealing with all too fallible human beings, whilst operating within a secular system and neoliberal framework that ironically affords them the freedom to establish and operate a faith institution in the first place.

Whilst such an assessment may prove unpalatable for many of the “true believers” I interviewed in this study, perhaps a more comforting and optimistic conclusion can be extracted too. I set out writing this thesis with no political agenda per se, however, in the process of generating and analysing data I believe I have demonstrated that some of the scaremongering taking place both before and after the Trojan Horse affair (Miah, 2015) cannot be applied wholesale. This qualitative study of Zamzam Primary depicts a slightly dysfunctional but essentially benign

⁴⁴ Although Summerhill itself might have its own educational methods increasingly restricted when beholden to the demands of Ofsted – the result of its most recent inspection was “requires improvement” (Ofsted, 2017).

institution, in possession of an ethos and curriculum intended to instil good character and conduct in pupils and facilitate employment prospects for them in a manner not too dissimilar from the average state school. This study thus provides a visceral and tangible representation counter to the negative caricatures of Muslim identities, ideologies and institutions, including schools, found both in the media and academia (for example, MacEoin, 2009). Nevertheless, there is much research to be done in this field and I would be intrigued to see if some of my findings, from the proliferation of pop culture to Ofsted conformity, are replicated in other Muslim educational settings. In particular, one suspects that the superdiverse body of staff in Zamzam Primary is a unique feature of life in a global city like London and would not be found elsewhere. That, however, is a project for another time.

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Appendix

Interview with Zamzam Primary School teachers Rumaysah and Sumayah July, 2015

Tom: I'll start with Rumaysah. How long have you been involved with the school for?

Rumaysah: Oh my God! (Long pause.)

Sumayah: It's been that long?

R: Yeah, it's been a long time!

S: Ten? Round it to ten!

R: (Long pause.) Ten years. I've been in and out.

T: When you started it would have been in its tiny incarnation.

R: I think there were thirty kids.

T: Really?

R: Less than that.

T: Wow.

R: There were hardly any families; you knew every single person!

T: How has the school grown, changed and developed in that time?

R: I think, well, more kids started coming.

T: Yeah.

R: And then the classroom size got bigger. And then there was a merger as well.

T: Really?

R: Yeah, there was a merger with Taqwah School.

T: What was Taqwah School?

R: It was more of an after school club. You know Moalim Farah? The Qur'an teacher.

T: Yeah, yeah.

R: They did supplementary things like Maths and English but it was mainly Qur'an. So then they merged those two schools, both Zamzam Primary and that school and

that brought in more kids.

T: There's been a change in numbers.

R: Yeah.

T: What other changes have you seen?

R: Before we used to have a lot of mixed children there wasn't really that many Somali kids. It was a mix of Somali and Algerian, Algerian and French, Moroccan, like, there was a lot- it was like a mixture, the school, and then all of a sudden the Somali people invaded!

T: What caused the "invasion?"

R: I think, firstly, because Somali parents are running away from state schools cause they think their kids are gonna get brainwashed or, you know. Secondly, as well, they know Moalim Farah cause he's the Qur'an teacher; many kids, they started coming because of that and their parents and things like that.

T: Interesting.

R: I remember, one year, there was only one-year six boy. One year six boy in the school.

T: What else have you seen change in your time here?

R: Before there was more women than men.

T: Teachers?

R: Yeah.

T: Aren't there more female teachers now?

R: We had one year where there was an even balance. There was one year where it was balanced. And then I remember, actually, there was one point where all the sisters were Niqabis except for me. That was like right at the start of the school. I know this sounds bad but I feel people were more religious. At one point there was only one man teacher in the school that was Waqas and then he left and Ayman came. Yeah, I think people were more religious back then. I think now people pretend to be.

S: (Half-gasps half laughs.)

T: Maybe that's because it was more of a community school then

R: Hmm.

T: And its become more professionalized now.

R: I don't think so cause I remember, like, Saidah was qualified and I remember, like, Ayman studied like over seven years so they were, like- even the other teacher, she was qualified and the even other teachers all had degrees and things but I think the difference was- yeah, it was more of a community school but, yeah, I feel people were more sincere. Now there are a few people in this place but not everyone: people behave how they think they should behave not necessarily who they are. And the parents and the kids and the staff had a much more closer relationship before.

T: Really?

R: Yeah, than now.

T: Why?

R: Because you would know everything about the kids. You would- you would know so much more about them. We used to have gatherings. You know the messenger books? Every letter used to get stuck in there. Parents had to sign it and things like that.

T to S: I'm going to bring Sumayah in, as I don't want you to be left out. What prompted you to work in a Muslim school?

S: I have tried state schools. I've taught at a state school. The first time I saw this school was, literally, ten years ago.

T: Really?

S: Way before I went to uni. I remember visiting and seeing Rumaysa from our Qur'an classes.

R: Qur'an classes.

S: That's it. She said come here, come work here but I thought, hmmm, its too homey I thought because my cousins came here. Then I went off to uni and it wasn't until recently when I've decided to sort of leave the state sector and try my hand at teaching in an Islamic environment because I had a lot of problems. There was actually at one point I was pebbled (laughs)!

T: Really!?

S: Yes! Stoned! In Eltham.

T: You were stoned in Eltham. As in stones not (makes inhaling sound).

S: In Eltham of all places. Yes. With pebbles.

T: Who by?

R: (Laughs).

S: Basically, what happened, so I was doing my NQT at Goldsmiths and, erm, you know how the unis send you out to different schools to do your placements at?

T: Yeah.

S: They sent me, my last placement of my NQT, sorry, my PGCE year, they sent me to a school in Eltham. I went to the course organizer saying, look, I don't feel comfortable going to Eltham. I don't know, I just had this perception of Eltham even though I live in south London.

T: Isn't that where Stephen Lawrence was murdered?

S: EXACTLY!

R: I always lived in that area, it's actually nice but you wore Niqab as well.

S: But you lived in Kidbrook side.

R: She wore niqab as well.

S: So what happened is, they said, no, no, no, its fine going there so I went there as well. It was within three days. The third day was like five, six o' clock walking to the bus stop and these kids came behind me and like, literally pebbled me. That was my first instance of- and I had to call the police right there and then, yeah, on the road. Anyway, that was my first instance of having a really bad experience at state school and then I had another bad experience at a state school and all of these things sort of stayed with me in a way.

T: Yeah, yeah.

S: And my mother advised me why don't you try an Islamic school, why don't you try a Muslim school; the nearest one is Zamzam Primary. Came here and obviously, my cousins, my uncle had good things to say about the school. Came here, had my interview, saw Rumaysa here still working, I wasn't aware she was still working here. I've known you for donkey's years.

R: (Laughs.)

S: It sort of cemented. I just thought, OK, this is a good idea.

T: What would you define as a Muslim school? What differentiates it from a state school?

S: I think there's lots of things similar. You'd be surprised. Other than the fact a lot of people are dressed differently and the way you approach people but other than that, teaching, learning, even managing is all the same. Literally, there's no difference.

T: Why do you think there's no difference?

S: I think we have to adhere to all the same rules and stuff isn't it at the end of the day.

T: And which rules would those be?

S: Because there's certain standards we have to follow and certain ways that a school has to operate whether you're an independent school or not you're under scrutiny anyway besides the parents have a certain level of expectations so they don't want to go to a Moalama they want a school that teaches-

R: But don't you think its perception because everyone thinks you work in a mosque like everything is good.

S: Yes.

R: Like my family think that.

S: Yeah.

R: They think it's so fantastic; you work in a mosque and you're with Muslims. I don't know, everyone has the idea that everyone's so friendly and everyone's so helpful, which is not true.

S: But I used to have that perception.

R: Yeah but I don't get it cause when you're out in the world you don't think that Muslims are all good.

T: Is it because the grass is greener?

R: No it's just everyone thinks ideally. And even my mum's like: you get to go in the mosque; you get to pray [Salah; you get to read Qur'an; you work with Muslims. My mum thinks you're like. Earning ajar, you're earning reward the whole day; it's like, that's not the case.

T: What are we actually imparting to the children then?

R: I think there are some kids who are very savvy and they know who's- people for what they are. Yeah, I feel kids know better than adults know adults. They are some kids that'll say, you know, I was told not to do that but then I saw that person doing that. There's certain things I don't say to kids. For instance, we don't let kids say "haram."

T: Yeah.

R: Personally, we don't let them say haram because I feel like they can just say everything's haram.

T: Yeah, of course.

R: Our kids don't say astagfirullah. They say alhamdulillah, yamaulkallah and give

salams that is it.

S: But didn't we have to train them at the beginning?

R: We did! We used to make them miss playtime.

T: Have they acquired that language here or at home or a bit of both?

S: Bit of both.

R: I think a bit of both. Because some people say astagfirullah like this but I think you should say it for something big.

S: Yeah.

R: Something big like, I don't know, I think it's, like, from how I was raised. When you did something big my mum would say it.

T: I suspect parents send their children to Zamzam Primary as they think it protects them from the outside world.

R: Of course.

S: Yeah.

R: Parents are always trying to protect their kids because, I feel like with the Somali community, they've seen what's happened to those other kids or they might know a story of a kid that's gone off the rails, or a kid that's in prison, or a kid that's not praying, there's always, like, with Somali people there's always a horror story! Then they think I if bring my kid to the mosque.

S: Yeah.

R: If I bring my kid to the mosque, they're gonna learn here, the school's going to teach them about adab and akhlaq and they're gonna learn Qur'an, they're gonna- all these things and then my child is gonna turn around teenager and be God fearing but that's not the reality.

T: Why is it not a reality?

R: Because the parents don't live that lifestyle themselves. Cause I've seen kids in this school and they will watch X-Factor.

T: Yeah-

R: Or they would-

S: What does that boy in your class say? I wasn't watching Netflix.

R: I wasn't watching Netflix and I'm like- and the other kids are like, what's

Netflix?

S: Not that it's anything bad.

R: I don't think that it's anything bad I'm just saying that parents should be honest with their kid.

S: Yeah or children would come out and say my mum listens to music.

R: Yeah I've heard that from kids in my class: my mum- my mum listens to music.

T: Yeah.

R: But says I shouldn't.

S: Yes.

R: I don't say- some of the kids in my class say it is haram to go to the cinema. I don't tell them it's haram because I take my little niece and I take my little nephew.

T: Was that the case ten years ago?

R: I wouldn't answer older kids, that's what I'd do. If I knew how their family is like I wouldn't answer them, I wouldn't tell them. I know it sounds- you know, there were kids before who wouldn't watch TV. Imagine, their parents would wake up for Fajr and wake them up for Fajr and they'd pray together whereas now the parents wake up for Fajr, let their kids sleep in and before they come to school they'll pray Fajr. Do you see?

S: Yeah.

R: but before, kids wouldn't really ask you about cinema but some kids would because they'd hear other kids but I know some kids in my class go to cinema and I wouldn't say to a kid cinema's like haram. And there's some kids that I know celebrate birthdays.

S: Yeah.

R: And I don't say to them because my little nephew and niece have a birthday party and stuff.

T: Have we adequately prepared kids for the real world here if we've protected them or is there even a bubble here?

S: No there isn't a bubble.

R: No.

S: Because even those kids who do live in a bubble they pick up things.

T: Yeah, yeah.

S: There are kids in my class who don't have TV and they're- and they're singing, like, that Frozen song.

R: (Laughs) "Let It Go."

T: (Laughs.)

S: They don't have a TV and they tell you heard it from others.

T: Yeah.

S: So there's no- there is no bubble.

T: Do you think parents sending their kids here are under the impression there is a bubble?

S: Yes, some are.

R: Some are.

S: Some are under the impression there is a bubble and that is why they want to protect them. Even today, there was a parent saying she's too scared to send her kids to a state school because she thinks, you know, it's going to mess up their-

T: Yeah, yeah.

S: But yeah, it's unfortunate.

T: Do you think children are insulated from certain types of behaviour here but not mainstream culture?

R: I don't think even behaviour because these kids have got other cousins or relatives that go to other schools-

S: Because there were some-

R: And they would show- It's like if a kid swears, right, they will still swear in front of their cousins and then these little kids will pick it up and they will say it; do you understand? So I think you can't do that, you can't. It doesn't work and I think parents know that.

T: So why would they send their kids here and pay for it as well!

R: I think some people do believe in it.

S: I don't know I think they're most likely either suspicious or don't trust the state schools. They think there's more...

T: Is that because of religion or partly quality of education?

S: Somalis have this- we're really suspicious people!

R: We are! Even doctors! Even doctors!

S: Paranoid!

S: To another level!

R: It's true!

S: I had a parent, a friend of mine who's a parent call me the other day – her kids are in state school – and her teacher must have said something to her about her son and she asked me, Sumayah, what do you think she was saying? What does this mean? Do you think she's telling me the truth?

R: Giggles.

S: I was like: I don't know! Because she already has- and her kids are perfectly well behaved but she doesn't trust this person so even if the teacher does come to you to speak to them about their kids they don't trust... its whatever. It's the same thing with the NHS.

R: We don't-

S: You don't-

R: We'd go Germany!

S: Yeah you would!

R: You would go here, listen to what they're saying and go: they're trying to kill me or they say so-and-so went into hospital and they took their kidney out, they took an organ out! There's always someone who's had an organ out!

S: Yeah!

R: There's so many Somali people walking around with missing organs! They'd go to Germany, you get it, and they'd go to Arab countries!

S: Ayyub's dad did that the other day: my uncle!

R: My mum did that! My mum went to Germany!

S: Yeah!

R: But it was quicker though! They were quicker because obviously my mum was paying money.

S: It sort of spills over into other parts; they just don't trust!

R: There's some parents that would say we don't trust them because they're not Muslim or they're just suspicious and think there's going to be side effects, something's going to happen to my kid.

T: But wouldn't there be side effects going to that same Non-Muslim doctor in Germany!?

R: No because Somali people believe that the doctors in Germany are better.

S: We're people who work by word of mouth.

R: Yeah.

S: So if one person says to you something-

R: It's gonna spread.

S: You believe it. You actually take it to heart.

R: If one day a parent came and they said Zamzam Primary is rubbish, I kid you not, every Somali parent would take their kid out.

T: (Laughs.)

R: We do that isn't it? That's how we experience life.

T: What prompts that willingness to pay for services?

R: Think of it this way. Somali people, they always said that they're not staying here forever, right? So they don't buy houses but if you go in their houses they've got, like, gold and they invest in clothes and nice furniture. We like the best of things, right, so I feel-

S: They would pay.

R: We would pay. They would pay (pause) cause they would think it's worthwhile.

S: Especially if somebody tells them it's worthwhile they-

R: Definitely. They would pay. If somebody says: this tuition is good everyone's running there.

T: Why would you pay though when you can get a service for free? Is it because of the perception the service is not as good?

S: Yeah.

T: Is it not as good because it's free?

S & R: No.

S: It's not to do with the fee.

R: They want their kid to have more opportunity.

S: They want the best of something.

R: 'Cause my little brother: my mum would pay £50 for him to have just one hour of Maths tuition and he used to have Maths and he use to do Chemistry, Biology and that was one hour and my mum would pay fifty pounds. He was a really good, mashallah, he was an excellent teacher. The thing is, other parents had said who their kids had finished their A-Levels and were going off to university, do you see? So like It's not that the parents don't trust the schools its- they're not going to put all their eggs in the school and say this school's gonna teach my kid Qur'an, no, we don't work like that! They're still going to go Madrassa; you might get them a teacher at home as well.

S: Yeah.

R: You'll still take them to school give them a tuition centre, but them the books they would need.

S: They go all out.

R: Yeah, they do, go all out.

T: Was this a characteristic of "back home"-

S: Yeah.

R: Or something that's happened in migration?

R: It depends because some people did have a good life back in Somalia.

S: In Somalia you didn't have to worry.

R: Yeah.

S: They had everything.

R: You did cause you were like- I was really young when I was in Somalia, I was only five when I left but you would go to dugsi, learn Qur'an-

S: You actually remember it?

R: Who me?

S: Yeah!

R: I remember I used to wake up early go learn Qur'an, yeah, but, you know, I feel I spent the majority of my life going to Qur'an lessons! (Laughs.) But like, you would go to Qur'an lessons, come home, like have your dinner; you would have, like, freedom!

T: Is there something capitalist in the culture back home that makes Somalis willing to pay for services?

S: Yes we are, we are very capitalist because if you look back, the majority of people were businessmen; that's all we did, isn't it?

R: Yeah, that's how they earned their living.

S: The state-

T: There's no welfare state isn't it?

S: There was no welfare state.

R: You had nothing to fall back on.

S: And the other thing is even if you worked for the state you'd still be private in a way like my father, he worked for the state but he was also a businessman at the same time and that wasn't a conflict. I mean, you have this now in this country it's not – we're not- If Somalis think something is good they'll pay for it and they don't have a guilty conscience of am I going against this-

R: Yeah, or am I wasting money. They don't think like that.

S: That's not a concern.

R: Yeah, I really think that's true. We don't care. Somali people don't think like that. They wouldn't feel guilty for paying money. Not at all.

S: Not if they thought it was good.

R: If they thought it was worth it they wouldn't feel guilty.

S: Yeah, but we don't have that – I'm not sure about the politics of Somalia – but that whole left wing, right wing whereas when we came to this country people do have that and you see people who are very vehement in the left, vehement in the right; you don't have that in Somalis. They're either – we used to have tribal elders and stuff like that.

T: it's probably because we've always had a class system here.

S: Exactly.

T: Taking it back to feudal times with lords, landlords etc. but if you had a tribal system.

S: There was a tribal system; that's how it came about. People were always mistrustful of politics from the West. I can remember when there were socialists and communists in Somalia.

R: Yeah, there were communists.

S: People used to label them as "gaan" because they had views that came from, like, the Soviet Union. So we don't have that – we had the tribal leader, the imam, the sheikh...

T: I'm looking at similarities between Somalis and Chinese migrants and I've seen that there are a lot of migrants who came here and are willing to pay for services.

S: But that's because they came here for a better life and if education is a gateway to the better life for their children then why not.

T: Definitely.

S: Every penny into it.

T: And it's not just a gateway but THE gateway.

S: Yeah.

R: But they know it's gonna pay off cause they know somebody that is doing well.

S: You come here for a better life.

R: Exactly.

S: Otherwise you'd sty-

R: Otherwise you'd all just stay in Somalia. What would be the point?

T: Sumayah, you referred to the school having to conform earlier. I didn't want to prompt you too much but did you mean Ofsted?

S: Partly Ofsted, partly parents, the LEAs, everything, isn't it. There's lots of scrutiny so at the end of the day, they have to be seen as professional, you have to be seen as doing certain things or running the school in a certain way.

T: If that's the case, how independent can a school like this be?

S: I think it depends on the leader. If you do have a revolutionary leader with a vision they would try and get people on board and change certain things but I think it's hard: you would have to think outside of the box.

T: Can that occur in conservative Muslim communities?

S: Not in Muslim schools because you are under more (pause) scrutiny than other schools, say. Also there has to be an alternative. What's the alternative? If you throw out the rulebook, as you say, throw out adhering to Ofsted and their standards, following the national curriculum; what is there? You need an alternative to buy into; or someone needs to come up with something else.

T: Do you think anyone in our communities could come up with that?

S: No cause they're still in that stage where they're establishing themselves; some schools do develop that bit- that identity. I told you about An-Nas isn't it?

R: U-hum.

S: An-Nas, they're very good at doing their own thing. They still get rated good and outstanding and stuff like that.

T: Why is that?

S: It's to do with the Headteacher. Simple. She came with her own ideas. She's very visionary. She thinks: look, we're gonna make this into the best Muslim school. She does hire people- she's very selective in the hiring process who think like her or buy into that.

R: If parents saw this school making a change and it benefitting their kids the parents would go along with it: Somali parents. 100%. If their kids get something out of it, they don't care. So if the kids were painting or something- and it did something for their kids and the kid told them they enjoyed it they would be like: do more painting.

T: Do you think there's much scope for children to bring the home culture into the school especially in terms of language?

R: What, like speaking Somali?

S: Their languages.

T: Yeah any home languages.

S: No. (Pause.) There isn't actually.

T: Is there a shared culture aside from religion at Zamzam Primary?

R: I don't think all the Somali parents see eye to eye.

T: Yeah, that's what I mean.

R: They just don't because there are some parents, Somali, who are religious and then there are some who are more Somali than religious. And then there are some who just bring their kids out of convenience or-

S: But that's because- An Nisa, for example, they're not linked to a masjid; it was literally built from the ground up because of the community. The community came together, you know, put together money and they built the school whereas here I just feel like there isn't that sense of ownership from day one.

R: This school doesn't belong to the parents. It doesn't belong to the kids. It belongs to the committee more than anyone, I would say.

T: Do you think parents have a different expectation when it comes to involvement and engagement? One of deferring responsibility by outsourcing teaching as opposed to partnership?

R: No, Ustadh, I don't think that's the case at all. You know with Somali parents: they don't trust anyone fully with their kid.

S: Yeah.

R: They don't.

S: It's not a case of: here's the money.

R: And go.

S: Take my kid.

R: They don't trust anyone with their kids.

T: If that's the case, wouldn't it be more likely that parents get involved with volunteering?

R: No, no, I think the problem is the school isn't reaching out to the parents.

S: Thank you.

R: I don't think they do. And I don't think they do enough.

S: There's no communication.

R: There is no communication. Parents find out things last minute.

S: Yeah.

R: And the thing that people don't realise is that sometimes both parents are working or one parent is working and the other parent is studying. A lot of these mothers are studying or working. So the school needs to understand that.

S: But isn't it the school's responsibility to bring parents on board: give them ownership

R: Yeah.

S: Like: this is your school, this is a community school.

R: They need to do more.

S: You don't get that feeling with this school.

T: Really?

S: It's more a sense of you just send the kids there and everything happens behind closed doors.

R: Parents would like to be more involved.

S: Yeah.

R: Cause that's what they tell us in the playground.

S: Definitely.

R: They want to be- they say they want to be more involved but they, they-

S: The school doesn't give them the opportunity.

R: The school doesn't give them the opportunity. This school it's like. They have to drop their kid at the gate or the door.

S: Yeah.

R: They don't have the opportunity to come upstairs or talk to the teacher or, you know, look at their kid's work and, you know, get to know the teacher cause I feel, like, Somali people: we're very sociable people.

T: Hm.

S: Yeah.

R: So give these guys the opportunity they'll come in. You know, some of these parents are dealing with a lot as well. Like, like: there's other circumstances. You find out parents are going through a break up-

T: Yeah, yeah; of course.

R: Or a separation so then it's like: they're not gonna be replying to like things from you and stuff.

T: Yeah.

R: Sometimes I think the teachers need to have a better relationship with their kids cause the kids will- sometimes they'll tell you too much but then you know where that parent's coming from, where that child's coming from.

T: Hm.

R: So you- and I feel like the school should be there to support the parents more cause there are, like, some parents who need more support.

T: When you say the school you mean the teachers? So surely it's the teachers' responsibility to reach out.

R: 100%. It's up to the teachers. Do I think the Headteacher has to do things: yes, but it has to be more the class teachers. They should speak to their parents.

S: Find out-

R: Find out things. You know these parents just speaking to them you can find out their whole life story. I'm not even joking.

T: But you have an advantage in that you are female and share a cultural background with the parents.

S: I don't think it's to do with the culture. I think if a parent- if a teacher was more approachable parents would-

R: They would come to them.

S: They would come to you; it's not even to do with gender.

R: Sometimes you have to seek them out.

S: Yeah, you have to put yourself out there.

R: And they're gonna know cause the parents already have an impression of how they think the teachers are already.

T: Of course.

S: Parents are never gonna approach you, let's be honest, because you think they're the professionals, they're the teachers; you tend not to- See: you're at an advantage. You're the professional, you're the- it's not a balanced relationship. If you were to go out there be friendly, find out about them, just speak to them.

R: I think, sometimes with Somali people- remember when you were little your parents would say the same respect you show us you show your teacher.

S: Yeah.

R: So sometimes it's like: it's your child's class teacher, if you have a problem you don't want to say anything cause you don't want your-

T: Yeah.

R: You don't want to rock the boat with them and plus you don't want to say something in front of you kid.

T: Surely if you're a paying consumer you'd feel empowered and entitled to probe and challenge the teacher.

S: There are! There was Jacque's dad!

R: Oh! Jacque's dad!

S: He went through a phase but then he calmed down. But there are some parents who have that perception, the majority of them are quiet.

T: Any final thoughts?

R: I would say Muslim schools are the same as state schools.

T: Really.

S: I would say there's hardly any difference.

R: Well, our kids pray Salah but then they don't even pray properly! Part of me just thinks: they're kids.

S: Shouldn't we be doing more in terms of- For now, it's an Islamic school, yes, you do say "Asalaamu alaikum" whatever. You have the Islamic, sort of, mannerisms but they only learn about Islam in-

R: Islamic Studies.

S: Islamic studies or they have the Qur'an but other than that there's really no difference.

R: Yeah but even in the Qur'an they don't know what they're saying! And you've seen some kids they just go (mimes) I would love to know what some of them are saying! They're just moving their mouths. Some of the kids use it as an opportunity to talk! I don't even agree with Qur'an in the morning cause the kid's just woke up! They're not in that head space to learn.

T: With that healthy scepticism you have why would one continue to work in a Muslim school?

S: Hm.

Long pause.

R: I think it's enjoyment of what you do.

S: Hm.

R: And liking the kids.

S: Definitely.

R: Not necessarily the adults. I would say the kids.

T: So why not go and work in a state school?

R: I don't think I'd find the personalities here. I actually think there's-

S: Satisfying.

R: We have quirky kids in Key Stage One. I don't think we have one normal one!

S: There isn't the same level of satisfaction. For example, when I was in state school you'd go in and come out and the kids were just kids, I saw them as work. It's bad to say but it's true; they were just a job whereas here I feel more, I dunno-

R: You feel more attached to the kids. a job

S: Yes. You care more for their education, you care more about their families even, um, or their home situations whereas in a state school it wasn't- I didn't feel...

R: You feel very invested in these kids.

S: Hm.

R: Especially when you know their backgrounds fully you care more so when they do something you might let it- I think sometimes even when a kid does something which I might normally scream my head off I would let it go because I know there's like something else to it and it's- sometimes I think it's not worth it cause I was a naughty kid.

S: I'm not surprised!

R: Heh?

S: I'm not surprised you were a naughty kid.

R: It's not worth it telling them off for everything but yeah, it's the kids; number one, yeah.